



RUTR 3340 Books Behind Bars: Life, Literature, and Leadership

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, Solzhenitsyn, Lermontov, 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 either Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center (<http://www.djj.virginia.gov/ResidentialPages/Beaumont.aspx>) or Culpeper Juvenile Correctional Center (<http://www.djj.virginia.gov/ResidentialPages/Culpeper.aspx>).

Thursdays: We will meet from 12:30 to 1:45 in either Pavilion VIII Room B002 or Pavilion VIII Room 103.

For more information, contact either Dr. Andrew Kaufman at akaufman@virginia.edu, or Mr. Rob Wolman, at rtw4c@virginia.edu.

Info Sessions: There will be information sessions about the course on Wednesday, Nov. 6, Tuesday, Nov. 12, and Monday, Nov. 18. All information sessions will be from 6:30-7:30 PM in New Cabell Hall Room 299A.

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-century Russian literature
- Understand some of the social, economic, and cultural forces, which 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
- Learn how becoming a better listener can improve your personal and professional life

Integration: How will this course help you see connections?

This course will help you to:

- Discover connections between your academic 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 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 of the skills necessary to lead discussions with residents.

First, you will be discussing the literature itself. You will focus on the themes and issues raised by 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 issues might resonate with the correctional center residents.

Once a work has been discussed, then you will practice facilitating informal 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. To that end, you will attend one orientation at either Beaumont Juvenile Correctional Center or Culpeper Juvenile Correctional Center, during which you will learn more about the residents, and learn about 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.

Once these preparations are complete you will begin a series of ten weekly literature discussion meetings with the residents, travelling either to Beaumont or Culpeper on Tuesday afternoons. The meetings last approximately one hour and twenty minutes, and it takes about an hour and ten minutes 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 what you are learning. Before each encounter, you will be given the opportunity to talk and/or write about your assumptions, expectations, and apprehensions. Afterwards, you will explore how your discussion facilitation experience affected your ideas, not only about literature, but about juvenile offenders, yourself, and what it means to read and study literature in a community context.

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 delinquency. Specifically, you will address changes in your thinking and/or writing 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.

As part your experience and ongoing self-assessment and reflection, you may be recording your interactions with the residents, and with one another. From time to time you may be asked to listen and comment on these recordings.

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.

REQUIRED READINGS

The works we will be reading in this class are short classics of Russian literature. You might be familiar with some of them from your other classes. That is not a problem, for each of these works could be read a hundred times, and every time offer new insights and inspiration. If, on the other hand, 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?
 - Given that I am going to die, how should I live?

The reading list for this course will be chosen from among the following:

“The Death of Ivan Ilyich” by Leo Tolstoy.

Tolstoy's most famous story about a judge who spends his life pursuing personal and worldly ambition. Only when he is diagnosed with a terminal illness does Ivan Ilyich really start to live and 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.

“The Wisdom of Children” by Leo Tolstoy

This collection of very short plays for children explores the themes of meaning and value, social justice, and the question of who is wiser in the ways of the world: children or adults. We would focus on three plays, “Property,” “Wealth,” and “On Compensation,” which raise some interesting questions about how to treat others that are as relevant today as they were in Tolstoy's time.

“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

The greatest Russian short story about 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.

“Diary of a Madman” by Nikolai Gogol

In this famous character study, we follow the daily life of a poor copyclerk Poprishchin as experienced from his point of view. We watch as he slowly descends into an imaginative world of his own creation in order to escape the solace of his life—a world in which dogs write letters to one another, the director’s daughter falls in love with him, and he himself becomes heir to the Spanish throne. With pity and humor, the story powerfully explores the themes of madness and obsession, as well as the effects social environment can have on one’s very sense of self.

“The 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.

Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky (selections)

One of the world’s great murder novels, *Crime and Punishment* is less of a Who Done It? than a Why Done It? It tells the story of a poverty-stricken student Raskolnikov who commits what he thinks is a carefully thought-out murder with rational justifications. Shortly after committing the crime, however, he is overwhelmed by remorse that launches him onto a harrowing journey towards self-understanding and spiritual redemption.

“The Search” by Fyodor Sologub

This short story tells the tale of a poor high school student, Shura, who is put through a humiliating search one day at school, because the principal believes that he has stolen a book. Of course, Shura didn’t steal the book, 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 little 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.

“The Queen of Spades” by Alexander Pushkin

This famous story tells the tale of a German-born Russian engineer—a high-strung obsessive man who believes that he has discovered a secret that will change his life forever. And indeed it does, but not in the way he intended. This playful and many-layered story raises important questions about the nature of obsession, the role of fate, and the power of stories to influence our lives in profound and unpredictable ways.

A Hero of Our Time by Mikhail Lermontov (selections)

The novel is about a young, charismatic womanizing rebel, who is controlling manipulative, and eventually dies in a duel of his own design. Yet people are charmed by him, and he is 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 to him. It is very contemporary.

The Twelve Chairs by Ilf and Petrov (selections)

This extremely funny, satirical novel tells the story of Ostap Bender, an unemployed con artist living by his wits in post revolutionary Soviet Russia. He joins forces with Ippolit Matveyevich Vorobyanninov, a former nobleman who has returned to his hometown to find a cache of missing jewels which were hidden in some chairs that haven been appropriated by the Soviet authorities. On their quest they encounter a wide variety of characters: from opportunistic Soviet bureaucrats to aging survivors of the prerevolutionary propertied classes, each one more selfish, venal, and ineffective than the one before.

“Matryona’s Home” by Alexander Solzhenitsyn

This short story by one of Soviet Russia’s most famous writers tells the tale of Matryona, a wise old Russian 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 the expediency of the moment, 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 human and natural world around us.

Poems

“To a Poet” by Alexander Pushkin

A short poem by Russia’s most famous poet advises young artists to heed his 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 inspiring poem raises questions about finding one’s inner truth and individuality that most young people deal with. It should stimulate interesting discussion.

“Native Land” by Mikhail Lermontov

In this short poem 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 students a sense of how patriotic Russians are, and 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:

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

The poem invites young readers to explore their inner world—a place that is uniquely their own, beyond the reach of others, and beyond the ability of words to capture.

“There is an enjoyment in a wilderness of trees...” by Vasily Zhukovsky

This poem describes the beauty of nature, and invites young readers to think about a place that is beautiful and sacred to them.

Other readings

In addition to the literature, there also will be some short reading selection chosen from among the following books:

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);

William J. McKeachie and Marilla Svinicki, *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (Wordworth Publishing, 2009);

Mark Edmundson, *Why Read?* (Bloomsbury, 2004); and Randall Sheldon, *Delinquency and Juvenile Justice in America* (Waveland Press, Inc., 2006).

RESEARCH PROJECT: "Awakening Youth Through The Humanities"

As a student in "Books Behind Bars" you will automatically have an opportunity to become a participant in the research project, "Awakening Youth Through the Humanities." This original study, funded by grants from the Office of the Vice President and Provost, the Curry School of Education, and the Center for the Study of Advanced Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, seeks to better understand the impact the "Books Behind Bars" service learning model is having on student's academic, social, and personal development.

In this study you will be asked to fill out some brief surveys. You will also be interviewed by either a trained research assistant or the course instructor, and the interviews will be recorded on videotape. The interview, of approximately one hour, will take place at the beginning and/or the end of the semester.

Your participation in the study should require a maximum of approximately 3 hours during the semester beyond the time spent on your day-to-day course activities.

For this study the interviews and questionnaires, as well as the materials you produce in the class itself—essays, journal entries, informal writing assignments, creative work, comments made during class discussions, as well as videotaped class discussions—will be used as research data. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Agreement, as well as a Materials Release Form indicating whether we may use your materials for research and publication purposes. Your materials will always be handled confidentially. Your actual name will never be used, and identifying information will be removed.

FORMER STUDENT RESPONSES TO "BOOKS BEHIND BARS"

"This has been perhaps the most exciting and revealing class I've had at Uva. I feel like I've come away a new person, one firmly attached to the school of thought that believes community interaction is the best way reach troubled or isolated kids and adults. I'm lucky enough to have found a place that hired me to do exactly that."

"This has been the best class I've ever taken. For once, I was actually able to take literature and apply it to a situation. I had almost forgotten that was possible. (Funny how classrooms can do that.) For me, literature had stopped being practical. I read a book, then analyzed it in class. I didn't stop to think about its real life applications, or how it could affect anyone other than critics."

"It was definitely my favorite class out of the entire year. And I feel like I learned the most out of all of my classes here. It was an incredible experience, very eye-opening. I'm kind of bummed that I now have three years ahead of me and I've already taken the best course UVA has to offer."

"I've genuinely valued the interplay between the academic and the non-academic, between the University and the Community and the blurring between those lessons we can learn in a classroom or from a text and those we take from life. More often should UVA be pioneering courses such as this one in which we step outside the boundaries of the campus and beyond our self-oriented pursuit of knowledge."

“It was that very human element of this class that differentiated it from nearly all other courses I have taken. It asks students for more than an intellectual interest, but requires a human interest in creating connections and relationships.”

“We impacted those kids. It’s exhilarating to say it, but we did. During one conversation, [a resident] turned to me and said ‘You know, I’ve told you things I haven’t told anyone. Not even my social worker.’”

“One of the first things that struck me was that the word ‘discussion’ was not a mere code word for ‘impress the teacher with my incredible wit.’ In this class we really do *discuss*, and these actual, real-life conversations have forced me into different ways of thinking.”

“I would consider a profession in teaching much more seriously now. . . . Perhaps this is the most serious and intense transformation I’ve experienced—I do think literature can change people and that words hold a tremendous, awe-inspiring power.”

“I learned about myself as a teacher and a facilitator, really kind of discovering the emotional side to being a teacher or being anyone with a goal that has to do with other people and trying to achieve something with other people.”

“In other classes, I’ve always felt responsible for *myself*. However, now that discussions are actual discussions (and I have to provide a provocative question/activity/etc.), I feel a tremendous amount of responsibility to my classmates *and* to the residents.”

“In other classes my main motivation is graduation. Motivation in this class was not to let these guys down. I had to be here to make sure they understand how much I care. I had to be here so they understand how dedicated I am to this program, and to make sure I make a difference, and take away as much as I possibly can from this. And I can’t say that’s how I feel about other classes at all.”

“This class is not just academic, you’re also adding a service component. You’re taking it out into the real world. You’re not just learning about literature anymore, you’re learning about life. You’re learning about parts of your community. You’re learning about how the system works. You’re learning about these different perspectives.”

“I laugh about this, but one of the things that I wrote about in my journal was that I actually got tricked into understanding the literature. Because I didn’t feel like it was an English class where you are sitting down and analyzing the literature. Then after we had these discussions. . . I came out going, ‘Heck, I actually understand that story better than any others. We’ve exhausted that story.’ It was like, Wow, I got tricked into understanding it without thinking I was doing any analysis.”

“From the very first day I realized that if anyone was a student, it was *me*. The second I put my foot through the door, I felt utterly displaced from any preconceptions I might have had about the residents. Far from a bunch of rag-tag ruffians and bloodthirsty cutthroats, these adolescents were highly feeling, emotive, complex, and even humorous.”

“One of the most important lessons was learning how similar I was to them. I made immediate connections and wasn’t expecting that. I was expecting for there to be a very profound barrier that might have take some time to get over. . . . But once you started talking you realize how similar you are.”

“Perhaps the most challenging—and relieving—part of this course is balancing the tasks of thinking emotionally, creatively, and intellectually. In most Literature classes, the class is encouraged to think only academically, to remove ourselves emotionally from the text. This method is effective for textual analysis, but it seems an ineffective means to truly grasping any real personal meaning from literature. In this class, however, I appreciate how we are afforded the time, space, and encouragement to react emotionally and personally, to debate whether or not we personally pity Akaky and Pechorin, because it allows for a greater connection to the texts, and for me, this has allowed the stories and poems we have read to affect and challenge me more deeply.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND HOW TO ENROLL

For more information, please contact either Dr. Andrew Kaufman at akaufman@virginia.edu, or Mr. Rob Wolman, at rtw4c@virginia.edu

Also, please be sure to read the Letter to Students and the Student Application available on SIS. Then, after reading those materials, if you are interested in applying for enrollment in this course, please fill out and submit the Student Application, which is due on Friday, December 20.