

POLI SCI 208 ESSAY PROMPTS

ESSAY 1:

Choose **one** of the four prompts below. In your answers, make use of **at least three sources** from class.

A) Founded in 2015 by New York University social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, Heterodox Academy is comprised of a growing number of college professors (including a few from Duke) who believe that higher education today suffers from a lack of intellectual diversity. The organization's website states:

A sign of an unhealthy scholarly culture is the presence of orthodoxy. Orthodoxies are most readily apparent when people fear shame, ostracism, or any other form of social or professional retaliation for questioning or challenging a commonly held idea.

Do you agree? Why or why not? In addition to drawing on sources from class, feel free to also draw on your own experiences at Duke to support your arguments.

B) The yard sign below is popular in some neighborhoods around America. Analyze the sign's assumptions and modes of discourse. In what ways might the sign enable greater unity, understanding, and persuasion across our politically divided country? Alternatively, in what ways might it do the opposite?



C) As schools in America continue to rename buildings named for individuals who held views that are now socially unacceptable (and to remove monuments or statues for the same reason), by what prudential and moral standards should we determine whether a renaming or a removal (or the “cancelling” of any notable person—past, present, or future) is warranted or *unwarranted*? In your answer, acknowledge the potential liabilities or hazards of setting the standard where you do.

D) Alan Jacobs, Kathryn Schulz, Amy Chua, Yuval Levin, and Ezra Klein are having dinner together. Naturally, the questions come up, “Why are we so polarized in America and what’s to be done about it?” Choose at least three of the dinner guests and imagine how they might respond to these questions. Finally, suppose that you crash the party and offer your own two cents. What might you say in response to them all?

ESSAY 2:

Choose *one* of the five prompts below. Make use of at least three sources from class in your answers. Display evenhandedness in your answers by first briefly explaining why a person might take a *different* position before going on to explain why you take your own view. Show humility by acknowledging where the weaknesses (or uncertainties) in your position may lie. Finally, demonstrate your goodwill by making your case in a positive manner.

A) Should we love our political “enemies”? If so, how and why? If not, why not? In your answer, be sure to explain what you mean by “love.”

B) Was Google right to fire James Damore?

C) Does Harvard treat Asian/Asian-American applicants fairly?

D) Should Greek life at Duke should be abolished?

E) Can we, should we, “defund the police”? Feel free to define the phrase as you like.

F) Can we, should we, move beyond the concept of racial identities?

G) Should college athletes be paid?

H) Make a case for or against reparations.

I) Should we legalize polygamy?

J) Defend or critique critical race theory.

K) Was William Clark right to bring a lawsuit against his school in Nevada?

ESSAY 3:

Choose *one* of the five prompts below. Make use of at least *three* sources from class in your answers. As with your previous essay, display evenhandedness in your answers by first briefly

explaining why a person might take a *different* position before going on to explain why you take your own view. Show humility by acknowledging where the weaknesses (or uncertainties) in your position may lie. Finally, demonstrate your goodwill by making your case in a positive manner.

A) Should members of the Duke community be required to use each other's preferred pronouns?

B) Should transgender athletes be allowed to compete in female sports?

C) Make a case for either the pro-choice or pro-life side of the abortion debate (which can include modifications or not-considered alternatives).

D) Should Duke have a campus in China?

E) Should Mohammad El-Kurd have been allowed to speak at Duke?

If you so like, you may include, as an appendix to your paper, a one- or two-page answer to the question below.

How has this class changed you or your thinking, if it has?