GESM120: Are Corporations People?  

Class Location: THH117  
Class Time: 8:30am-9:50am  

Instructor: Dr. Kenneth Silver  
Email: kmsilver@usc.edu  
Office: Mudd Hall of Philosophy, room B5C  
Office hours: Monday, 1pm-3pm  

Course Description  
We often hear the slogan in the news and on placards, “Corporations are not people!” Corporations don’t breathe or bleed, so, in one sense this sounds obvious. But then, what’s all of the fuss about? The question is: Just what is it to be a person? And what does it take to merit the rights and privileges to which people are entitled? In this class, we will explore the foundation of our rights as people, as citizens, and as humans. This will help us to get a better grip on who we are and why we take ourselves to be morally significant. Ultimately, thinking deeply about what makes us persons will help us arrive at a more informed opinion concerning whether or not there is a relevant sense in which corporations are people as well.  

Units  
Unit 1: The Stakes of the Debate  
Unit 2: What are Corporations?  
Unit 3: What are People?  
Unit 4: Are Corporations People, and Is That What We Really Care About?  
Unit 5: Morally Relevant Capacities  
Unit 6: Applications for Our Conclusions  

Course objectives  
1) Come to a deeper understanding of what makes something a person, and apply this understanding to critical questions in politics, economics, and the law.  
2) Develop analytical skills through critical reading and clear writing.  
3) Cultivate speaking and listening skills through in-class discussion.  

Prerequisites  
There are no prerequisites for this course.  

Books needed for the course  
None. We will primarily be reading articles that can be obtained from the university’s online catalogue.
Paper and Exam Dates
Weekly Short Argument Papers due Saturday at 5pm after every week except Week 1, 3, 14, 15
Long Paper Assignment due Saturday, December 2\textsuperscript{nd} at 5pm
Exam on Wednesday, December 6\textsuperscript{th} from 8am-10am

**Schedule of readings and lectures**
Make sure to do all of the readings listed for a day before that class.

**Week 1**
Mon. Aug. 21\textsuperscript{st}
**Reading:** No reading

Lecture: Introduction to the topic and philosophical methodology

Wed. Aug. 23\textsuperscript{rd}
Sections: Introduction, 28-41, 74-90

Lecture: A closer look at the opinions in *Citizens United*

**Week 2**
Mon. Aug. 28\textsuperscript{th}

Lecture: Continued discussion of the reasoning in *Citizens United*

Wed. Aug. 30\textsuperscript{th}

Lecture: What is a business?

**Week 3**
Mon. Sept. 4\textsuperscript{th}
LABOR DAY – NO CLASS!

Wed. Sept. 6\textsuperscript{th}
Lecture: An early view of the Firm

Week 4
Mon. Sept. 11th

Lecture: Contract theories

Wed. Sept. 13th

Lecture: More views of the corporation

Week 5
Mon. Sept. 18th

Lecture: Persons, consciousness, and self-consciousness

Wed. Sept. 20th

Lecture: Persons, desires, and freedom

Week 6
Mon. Sept. 25th

Lecture: Factors beyond mental capacities necessary for personhood

Wed. Sept. 27th

Lecture: Are corporations people? A direct discussion

Week 7
Mon. Oct. 2nd

Lecture: Against corporate responsibility

Wed. Oct. 4th

Lecture: The difference between a person and an agent

Week 8
Mon. Oct. 9th

Lecture: When is something worthy of moral consideration?

Wed. Oct. 11th
**Reading:** Kant, I. (1785) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. (portions)

Lecture: The importance of rational capacities for moral status

Week 9
Mon. Oct. 16th

Lecture: Against corporate moral agency and their having moral goals

Wed. Oct. 18th

Lecture: Is it squad goals, or goals for squads?

Week 10
Mon. Oct. 23rd

Lecture: The discursive dilemma and corporate decisions
Wed. Oct. 25th  

Lecture: Possible responses to the discursive dilemma

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**Week 11**
Mon. Oct. 30th  

Lecture: Group agency

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Wed. Nov. 1st  

Lecture: The importance of caring and emotions

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**Week 12**
Mon. Nov. 6th  

Lecture: Corporate emotions

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Wed. Nov. 8th  

Lecture: Do corporations have reactive attitudes?

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**Week 13**
Mon. Nov. 13th  

Lecture: Sentience

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Wed. Nov. 15th

Lecture: Are corporations vulnerable enough to matter?

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**Week 14**

**Mon. Nov. 20th**


Lecture: Forget personhood. What about citizenship?

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**Wed. Nov. 22nd**

THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS!

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**Week 15**

**Mon. Nov. 27th**


Lecture: Should corporations have a say in policy?

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**Wed. Nov. 29th**


Lecture: More on implications for corporate personhood

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LONG PAPER ASSIGNMENT DUE: Saturday, December 2nd 5pm

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**Final Exam: Wednesday, December 6th 8am-10am**

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**Course requirements**

1. Regular attendance and participation at lectures. This counts for 10% of the course grade.
2. Unannounced in-class 10 minute quizzes on the reading assigned for that class session. This counts
for 10% of the course grade.
3. Eight Short Argument Papers. There are eleven possible weeks in which to do papers, and you must do eight of them. If you do a ninth paper, then I will only grade your best eight. This counts for 40% of the course grade.
4. One Long Paper Assignment. This counts for 20% of the course grade.
4. An in-class essay final examination. This counts for 20% of the course grade.

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale
A  93-100
A- 90-92
B+ 87-89
B  83-86
B- 80-82
C+ 77-79
C  73-76
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D  63-66
D- 60-62
F  59 and below

Course policies

Students with disabilities
Any student who has registered with the office of Disability Services and Programs (DSP) and who has been certified by DSP as needing specific accommodations will gladly be afforded those accommodations. Please meet with the instructor as early as possible in the semester to discuss the best ways of providing these accommodations. I am very glad to work with you to tailor the course requirements to your specific needs subject to considerations of general fairness for all students in the class.

Academic conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” https://policy.usc.edu/student/scampus/part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.
Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office http://equity.usc.edu and/or to the Department of Public Safety http://dps.usc.edu. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support systems
A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://ali.usc.edu, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://dsp.usc.edu provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Paper submission, deadlines and format
Please submit your papers through Blackboard. Please format your papers as follows: 12-point font, double-spaced, at least one inch margins all around, your name on the top right-hand corner of the first page. Do not include your student ID number or any other possibly sensitive identifying information on your papers or any other correspondence with instructors. Late papers, if accepted, will have their grade reduced by 1/2 of a grade for each day beyond the due date.

Classroom protocol
During quizzes or examinations: All books, notes, and screened devices (including laptop computers, tablets, smartphones, and smartwatches) must be stowed away. If you do not have the means to stow these materials out of sight (e.g. in a backpack or other bag, or under a sweater, etc.) you may bring them to the front of the classroom and retrieve them at the end of the writing exercise. Additionally, no earphones may be worn during the period of the writing exercise. Violations of these prohibitions constitute an academic integrity violation.

Communication
I will strive to respond promptly to your e-mail inquiries, comments, etc. Given the volume of e-mail I receive, it will help us if you will begin the subject line of your messages with 'Business Ethics'. Examples: ‘Business Ethics request for a meeting’ or ‘Business Ethics question’.