Course Description

Political theory involves paying close attention to the concepts, ideas, values, and language we use to understand political life, evaluate and examine political institutions, judge existing political practices, critique them, and develop visions of new ones. This course is an introduction to the history of political theory and presents students with a first half of the theoretical core of the canon of Western political thought, from the key works of political thinkers from antiquity to the first modern political texts of the sixteenth century. Despite their age, the arguments and ideas in these texts continue to inform, shape, and challenge ways of understanding and evaluating contemporary political phenomena. In this course, students will learn to analyze classical political texts and develop a “tool box” for the further study of political theory. The aim of the course is not only to present students with key notions and ideas from classical texts of Western political theory but also to encourage them to apply critical and analytical thinking in their analyses.

We will read and engage with the main themes, concepts, and arguments presented in seminal works from the first half of the history of Western political thought in the broader context of the theoretical framework delineated by the concepts of power and political community. In this course, we will ask and critically engage with questions such as the following: Where does political power emanate from? Where is it located, and how is it constituted? Who has the power to order the political sphere of society and shape the political community? What normative, institutional, social, and economic forces are responsible for particular political forms? What are the forces that keep the political community intact? What are the obligations of the members of the political community to each other and to the collective at large? Who is included or excluded from membership in political society? Does the political community have the power to change its forms, and on what grounds could it do so? In a critical engagement with these questions from the standpoint of the theories presented in the readings, this course will address the notions of justice, law, human nature, freedom, order, equality, and emancipation, among other ideas that have been mobilized in the context of politics. The course encourages students to think critically in a contemporary political context regarding these ideas. Key thinkers will include Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau.

Learning Objectives

- Understanding, applying, and critically assessing the theoretical concepts, questions, and arguments presented in major texts of Western political theory.
- Learning to interpret political theory texts - their arguments, styles, and levels of meaning.
- Interpreting main arguments and considering their historical and cultural contexts, as well as their continued relevance.
- Learning how to make well-reasoned, persuasive arguments about political concepts and conditions based on the application of critical thinking.

Required Readings

Throughout this course, we will be using an anthology that contains key texts of Western political thought. This book is required for this course, and it is available for purchase at the university bookstore.

Additional texts have been placed online on Blackboard. You should print them out, read them carefully, and bring them to class with you. Reading them online or on your electronic devices in class will not do it.

Course Requirements

As a student registered for this class and receiving course credit, your responsibilities are:

- Attend all lectures.
- Arrive to lectures on time.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date, and come to class prepared.
- Contribute to a respectful academic environment, refraining from unrelated conversations or use of technology.
- Bring assigned readings to class with you.
- Be an active listener during the lectures: take notes, ask questions, raise points of critique.

Assignments

This course does not have a standard midterm or final exam. Instead, there is a midterm paper and final research paper, which will carry the same academic and grade values as midterm and final exams. In addition, there will be two short, two-page homework assignments, each in the form of responding to a question that will be emailed to your SUNY e-mail address and also posted on Blackboard. You will have to print out your answer, bring it to class on the day the homework is due, and submit it to me at the end of the lecture before you leave the room. Remember, this is a political theory class. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. What is required is your own critical and analytical thinking. You will do well if these characteristics are reflected in your homework assignments.

Office Hours:

You should not feel any hesitation in engaging me in a dialogue on the course material at any time before or after the class. You’re also welcome to see me during my office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., in the Humanities B16 office. In addition, I will be available to meet you outside of these hours at a time convenient for you if you schedule an appointment with me by e-mail at least two days in advance.

Blackboard:

As mentioned above, a few additional readings are placed on Blackboard for your convenience. Find the course, RPOS 103, History of Political Theory, and then click on it. Here you will find readings for the course and the syllabus. The short homework assignments will also be posted on Blackboard in addition to being sent to your SUNY e-mail address. I strongly recommend you to download and print off the readings and bring them into lectures.

Attendance

You are responsible for all material covered in the class. Attendance will be taken within the first five minutes of the class. You should make arrangements with other students to share notes if you miss the class. If you have an excused absence, make sure you do assigned readings first, then come to me during office hours to discuss the missed material.

**Missing more than 2 classes, repeated lateness, or arriving unprepared will lower your final grade by one letter grade. Missing more than 4 classes will result in 2 letter grades lower on the final course grade.**

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Please be warned that if found guilty of plagiarism, you will automatically fail the course and receive an E grade. Further actions will be taken, including sending your case before a university committee. Remember, taking text off internet sites such as Sparknotes or Wikipedia and "reworking them" will also earn you an E along with further actions. The whole
idea of this course is for you to engage in active, critical thinking of your own and to demonstrate that you worked with the texts and on the basis of it you are constructing clear arguments with proper citations.

**Course Grade Breakdown**

Midterm paper: 25%.
Three short response papers: 20% (No more than 2 pages each)
Final paper: 40%
Class participation and attendance: 15%

**Overall Course Grade Requirements:**

1. **Class Participation and attendance (15%):** Based on evaluation of your participation in class discussions, your preparedness for each class, attendance and lateness. Having an individual grasp of the reading at hand prior to classroom sessions means that you will be able to understand the relevant concepts and ideas and be able to apply them to the discussions with your fellow students during each session in a critical, respectful and meaningful way. Your ability to participate in the class discussion will depend on the effort you put in reading assigned materials at home. The texts are engaging and exciting but also complicated and time consuming. Spent time wresting with ideas of each thinker and you will be rewarded by gaining a deeper understanding of their arguments which will enrich your knowledge as a political thinker.

2. **Two short response papers (20%)** These are short 2 page answers to the questions pertaining to a particular sections of the course. Questions will be distributed three days prior to the due date.

3. **Midterm paper (25%)** 5-6 page response paper on a topic relevant to the material covered in the first half of the semester. A set of questions will be distributed one week prior to the due date. No late submissions, or submissions by e-mail will be accepted. You will have to hand in a physical hard copy of your paper to me at the place and on the date of a mid-term exam. This is the ONLY WAY your midterm papers will be accepted. The midterm exam date will be **Friday, October 21, 12:35pm – 1:30 pm in the same classroom. (HU 132)**

4. **Final Paper (40%)** 10-page paper on a question, problem, or topic that you think is important in relation to what has been studied and discussed during the class and in the readings. Depending on the question, you may have to do some additional research in order to gain the proper level of knowledge on the thinker or the problem you have chosen to investigate. You are expected to finalize and approve your topic with the instructor **no later than Monday, December 5th**. No late submissions, or submissions by e-mail will be accepted. You will have to hand in a physical hard copy of your final paper to me at the place and the date of a final exam. This is the ONLY WAY your papers will be accepted. The exam date and place will be **Tuesday, December 20th at 8:00am – 10:00am in the same classroom (HU 132)**

**Midterm and Final Papers**

Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through a midterm and final research papers. **No late submission of mid-term or final papers will be accepted.**

**Late mid-term or final paper submission will be accepted or incomplete grades will be given only in the event of serious personal or family illness or other unusual circumstances approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.**

For more information on the University's Standards of Academic Integrity see: [http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml)

**Lectures**

Lecture is a time for a professor to present the readings and unpack the arguments presented in texts at hand. However, I strongly value the benefits of a seminar type lectures. The form of intellectual dialogue is the most rewarding academic practice. That means, you are strongly encouraged to participate in a dialogue about the
material. Feel free to interrupt me by raising your hands and asking questions. Do not shy from respectfully responding to other students’ arguments and participating in classroom discussions. Your participation will boost your grade overall. I encourage you to be an active participant in lectures, rather than a passive listener.

**Grade Appeals**

In order to appeal a grade on a particular assignment, you should contact your TA or the professor during office hours **within 2 weeks** of receiving the assignment back and submit a written explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed, not to exceed 2 pages. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, or left as is, depending on the results of the review. After two weeks, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances like a serious illness.

**What do I do if I am sick or need alternate arrangements to fulfill course requirements?**

Any mitigating circumstances should be brought to the attention of the professor as soon as possible. Any foreseeable circumstances (athletic event, religious holiday, e.g.) must be raised at the beginning of the semester or as early as possible.

**Excused Absences**

If you must miss the mid-term or final paper deadline or more than two normal classes, you must have documentation from the **dean of undergraduate studies** (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) or your grade will be adversely affected. For more on University's Medical Excuse Policy see: http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml

**Reasonable accommodation**

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html).

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations, for the above reasons or other cases including religious holidays, inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and rarely granted retroactively.

**What can I do to succeed academically in this course?**

*The Basics: Show up, read, listen, take notes, ask questions*

The most important indicator for success is completing assigned readings, regular attendance and active participation in a class.

**Visit Office Hours**

I will hold office hours two hours each week. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to discuss material or other questions on political theory, or if you are seeking an advice on academic success. If you are unable to attend the scheduled office hours due to a conflict with another class, email me to request an alternate time.

**Writing Center Services (Humanities 140)**


**Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)**

Arrange individual and group tutorial as well as study skills workshops on time management, how to improve your concentration, essay exam skills, listening skills, and overcoming procrastination. Visit their website: http://www.albany.edu/oass/support_services.htm or contact them at 442-5180.
COURSE OUTLINE

Monday - Aug. 29
• Introduction.

Wednesday - Aug. 31
What is Polis?

Friday – Sept. 2
What is Theoria?

Monday – Sept. 5
• No class – Labor Day

Plato
All the readings indicated below are from The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought. Additional readings are placed on blackboard

Wednesday - Sept. 7
Democratic background of the Ancient political thought
• Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.40. “Pericles Funeral Oration” in Broadview Anthology, pp. 1 – 4.
Justice, Tradition, Power, Law

Friday – Sept. 9
• Plato, Gorgias pages 50, 51, 52, 53. (On Blackboard)

Monday - Sept. 12

Wednesday – Sept. 14
The beginnings of the just city

Friday – Sept. 16
Rulers of the just city: the emergence of the guardians and justice as ordering of classes.
• Plato, The Republic, Book III (excerpt) and Book IV (excerpt), in Broadview Anthology, pp. 59 – 74.

Monday – Sept. 19
• Plato, The Republic, Book V (excerpt), in Broadview Anthology, pp. 75 – 90.

Wednesday – Sept. 21
Philosopher Kings
Friday – Sept. 23

Monday – Sept. 26
*Philosopher’s Education: Political forms and the cycle of decay*

Wednesday - Sept. 28
*The emergence of the tyrant*

Friday – Sept. 30
*Democracy vs Philosophy?*

Monday – Oct.3
*No Class – Rosh Hashanah*

Wednesday – Oct.5

**Aristotle**


Friday – Oct.7
*Citizen, political community and the State*

Monday – Oct.10
First short response paper assignment announced.

Wednesday – Oct.12
*No classes – Yom Kippur*

Friday – Oct.14
*First short response paper due (hard copy in class)*

Monday – Oct.17

Wednesday – Oct.19

Friday – Oct. 21
- Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution (Parts 20 – 30)* (On blackboard)

**Cicero**

Morality and republic

Monday – Oct.24
*Midterm paper questions announced*
•  *Cicero, On Duties, Book I (On blackboard)* pp. 1 – 18.

**Wednesday – Oct. 26**
•  *Cicero, On Duties, Book I (On blackboard)* pp. 18 -30.

**Friday – Oct. 28**
•  *Cicero, On Duties, Book I (On blackboard)* pp. 30 – 44.

**Monday – Oct. 31**
MIDTERM EXAM PAPERS DUE IN CLASS

**Part II. Early Modern Western Political Thought**

**Machiavelli**

Politics as praxis

**Wednesday – Nov.2**

**Friday – Nov.4**

**Monday – Nov.7**

**Wednesday – Nov.9**

**Hobbes (Social Contract Theory)**

Sovereignty, state and political community

**Friday – Nov.11**

**Monday – Nov. 14**

**Wednesday – Nov. 16**

**Friday – Nov.18**

**Monday – Nov.21**

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

Politics, freedom, equality

**Wednesday – Nov.23**

Second short response paper question announced
Friday – Nov. 25
No class – Thanksgiving break

Monday – Nov. 28
Second response paper due in class

Wednesday – Nov. 30

Friday – Dec. 2

Sovereignty Rethought

Monday – Dec. 5

Principles of Government

Wednesday – Dec. 7

Friday – Dec. 9

Monday – Dec. 12
Final exam paper questions announced

Wednesday – Dec. 14

Friday – Dec. 16

Monday – Dec. 19
Course wrap-up.

Tuesday – Dec. 20
FINAL EXAM. Final exam papers should be handed in in the same classroom between 8am and 10am.