RPOS 103: Introduction to Political Theory  
Spring 2013: What is Political Freedom?  
(4464)

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Tues/Thurs 11:45 – 1:05  
Lecture Center 2  
Office hours:  
Thurs 10:15-11:15, 1:05-2:05

Course Objectives

1) To understand, apply and critically assess different theoretical concepts, questions, and styles of argument presented by significant texts in the history of western political theory.
2) To recognize and analyze competing definitions of political freedom.
3) To learn how to interpret political texts, considering their historical and cultural context as well as their continued relevance.
4) To learn how to make well-reasoned, persuasive arguments about political concepts and conditions.

This course satisfies the general education requirements for Humanities and Europe.

Course Description

This course introduces students to political theory as an essential component of the study of politics. Political theory involves paying close attention to the concepts, language, and values we use to understand and judge our political institutions and practices. We ask, for example: What is the meaning of political freedom? Are our political institutions and practices democratic in name only? Do the practical demands of wielding political power aid or impede justice? Considering such political questions is a job not just for scholars, but for all citizens in a democracy.

Over the course of the semester we will focus on one important question: what is political freedom? We will consider this question from the perspective of three very different theorists: Plato, Locke, and Tocqueville. Each represents a distinctive way of thinking and speaking about politics. We will then consider how defenses of freedom have the capacity to create and reinforce political exclusion. The writings of Beauvoir, Marx, and Douglass will guide us in investigating how the power relations structured by gender, class and race pose challenges to political freedom.
What does this course require of me?

Required Readings
The following texts are required for this course and are available for purchase at the University bookstore, Mary Jane Books (corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street), and online:

- Plato, Republic (Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- John Locke, Political Writings (Hackett Publishing, 2003)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (Penguin, 2003)
- Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto (Signet Classic, 2011)
- Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Signet Classic, 2005)

Additional on-line readings will be made available on-line (indicated by * in the schedule of readings)

Consideration has been made to use low cost texts and on-line readings whenever possible. You are strongly encouraged to purchase these editions. On-line readings must be printed out and brought to class. Doing so will make it easier to follow along in class, using the same page numbers as everyone else in the class. Every student must acquire all texts and read every assignment.

Course Requirements
- Attend all lectures and discussion sections.
- Arrive on time.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date for lecture and discussion section.
- Contribute to a respectful academic environment by listening to the comments of others and refrain from unrelated conversation or use of technology.
- Come to discussion section prepared to participate actively in discussions of texts.
- Bring assigned texts to lecture and discussion section with you.

Attendance
You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and discussion. Attendance will be taken in discussion sections, but not in lecture. Lecture notes will not be provided by the professor or TAs. Lecture slides will be posted on-line, but they will not provide the content given in lecture. You are encouraged to make arrangements with other students to share notes for missed classes. If you have an excused absence, you should come to office hours to discuss the missed material.

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

Laptops and other electronic devices
The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged in both lecture and discussion section. If you wish to use laptops in class, you must ask permission beforehand. Phones, iPods, and all other electronic devices are to be turned off before lecture and put away every class.
How will I be evaluated in this course?
Midterm Exams (2): 25% each; Discussion section, in-class and online assignments: 20%; Final Exam: 30%

Exams: Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through midterm and final exams. The final exam will test you on material from readings and lectures from the entire semester. Exams will combine short- and long-answer questions.

Make-up examinations, early examinations, 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.

Discussion Section: Worth 20% of the course grade, participation in discussion sections is highly valued in this course and is essential for your success. The greater the quality and quantity of your participation, the more rewarding the class will be for everyone. Be prepared for every discussion section with some contribution: a question, an interesting observation, and/or an opinion on the readings. When the material is particularly difficult is the best time to bring questions about particular passages or key terms. Asking and answering questions in lecture and attending office hours with a TA or professor can also improve your discussion grade.

The Discussion Section grade is based on four components:
1) Attendance: Attendance will be taken each week in discussion section, but attendance alone is insufficient to receive full credit for participation. Missing more than two classes, recurring lateness, or arriving unprepared will lower your final grade by a full letter grade; missing 4 will lower it 2 letter grades.
2) Discussion: Each student is expected to regularly make an active and thoughtful contribution to class discussions. This includes asking questions, commenting on the readings and formulating opinions. You are particularly encouraged to respectfully respond to your fellow students’ thoughts and opinions.
3) In-class assignments: During lecture or discussion section, you may be asked to complete on-line or written exercises. In-class assignments may be given without notice periodically throughout the semester. They will be one page or less and are intended to test your understanding of the reading and clarify ideas for discussion. There will be no opportunity to make up missed in-class assignments. Missed assignments will be disregarded in the case of documented, excused absences.

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, lowered, 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 or TA 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 an exam 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.

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 this course, 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 are 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 and regular attendance in lecture and discussion. Of course, that assumes that you pay attention in class, take notes, and actively participate.

Study Questions
Study questions will be posted on-line for each assigned reading. These questions are meant to help you focus on key concepts and themes for this course. They should not be turned in and will not be graded. You are encouraged to take a look at the questions before beginning your reading to get a sense of what to look for. These questions are a starting point for thinking about the readings, but they do not exhaust the range of questions you will be expected to answer about the texts in discussion sections, lectures, and assignments.

Visit Office Hours
Both the professor and teaching assistants will hold office hours two hours each week. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to discuss material in lectures, other questions on political theory, and advice on academic success. If you are unable to attend the scheduled office hours due to a conflict with another class, email to request an alternate time.
Teaching Assistants
There are three teaching assistants (TAs) for this course: Yeufen Hsieh (yhsieh4@albany.edu), Sean McKeever (smckeever@albany.edu), and Reed Williams (rwilliams5@albany.edu). You are required to enroll in a discussion section led by one of them. Your TA is a very valuable resource for you as they can help you understand readings, prepare for exams, and answer your questions about political theory.

Writing Center (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.

What is unacceptable behavior for this course?
Cheating and Plagiarism
Under no circumstances should you submit someone else's work as your own. This includes, but is not limited to: copying text from another student on tests or papers, copying text from internet sites (e.g. Wikipedia, Sparknotes) or other sources without quotations marks and full citations, or submitting your own work from another course.

Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in course failure and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html

Disruptive Behavior
No student may engage in conduct that disrupts or impedes the ability of the instructors to teach and/or students to learn. This includes, but is not limited to making loud or distracting noise, visually distracting students or instructors, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.
Schedule of Readings and Assignments
Reading selections will be made available online.
** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

Jan 24  
Introduction

** Discussion sections do not meet Jan. 25. **

I. Is Political Freedom a Contradiction?

Jan 29  
Milton Freedman, Capitalism and Freedom (selections)*

Jan 31  
Emma Goldman, “A New Declaration of Independence”*  
“Was My Life Worth Living?”*  
“An Anarchist Looks at Life”*

II. Three Concepts of Freedom

A. Freedom as Truth

Feb 5 - 7  
Plato, Republic, Book 1 - 2

Feb 12 - 14  
Plato, Republic, Selections from Books 4-5

Feb 19  
Plato, Republic, Selections from Book 6-9

B. Freedom as Individual Choice

Feb 21  
Second Treatise, Ch. 1-4

Feb 26 - 28  
Second Treatise, Ch. 5 – 9

Mar 5  
Second Treatise, ch 19 and Review

Mar 7  
Midterm Exam

** Discussion Sections do not meet March 8 **

C. Freedom as Association

Mar 12 - 14  
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

** Discussion Sections do not meet Mar. 15 **

March 15 – 22  
Spring Break
Mar 26  Online Assignment due
Mar 28  Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Apr 2 – 4  Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Apr 9  Review: What is Political Freedom?
Apr 11  **Midterm Exam**

**Discussion sections do not meet Apr. 12.**

**III. Challenging the Limits of Freedom**

Apr 16, 18  Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
Apr 23, 25  Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
Apr 30, May 2  Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (selections)*

**Week 15**
May 7  Review: Reinventing Political Freedom

**Final Exam Thurs, May 16, 8-10 am in Lecture Center 2**