RPOS 103: Introduction to Political Theory  
Spring 2015: What is Political Freedom?

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Tues/Thurs 2:45 – 4:05  
Lecture Center 1  
Office hours:  
Tues/Thurs 4:05-4:45  
& Tues 12:30-1:10

Course Objectives

1) To understand, apply and critically assess 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.

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, John Locke, and Alexis de 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 Karl Marx and Frederick 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. Please try to get these editions:

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Signet Classic, 2005)

Additional on-line readings will be made available on-line (indicated by *)

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 of lectures. You should make arrangements with other students to share notes for missed classes. If you have an excused absence, 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 phones and tablets in class is prohibited. They must be turned off and stored in your bag during class. The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged in both lecture and discussion section. If you need to use a laptop as an exceptional case, speak to me for permission and to make appropriate arrangements.
How will I be evaluated in this course?
Midterm Exams (2): 30% each; Discussion section, in-class and online assignments: 20%; Final Exam: 20%

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

Reading Questions
Reading 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**
Your teaching assistant is a very important contact person for almost all matters related to this course. S/he will be responsible for helping you to understand readings and lectures, facilitating discussion between you and fellow classmates, and grading your work. Be sure you know your TA’s name, email address, and office hours and use them as a resource.

**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](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. It is also unacceptable to submit your own work from another course without prior permission.

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](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
**This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.**

Jan 22
Introduction: What is Political Theory?

** Discussion Sections do not meet January 23 **

I. Is Political Freedom a Contradiction?

Jan 27
Milton Freedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (selections)*

- **Assignment:** Submit a 3x5 card with your picture attached (photocopies, computer print-out are OK; glue, tape or staple to attach) and the following information on it: name, year, major (or intended), related coursework, email address.

  **Due in discussion section Friday, Jan 30.**

Jan 29
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 3 - 5
P[le, *Republic*  
  Feb 3: Book 1  
  Feb 5: Book 2

Feb 10 – 12
P[le, *Republic*  
  Feb 10: Book 3, pp 106-110 (413d – end of Book 3)  
  Feb 12: Book 4

Feb 17 – 19
P[le, *Republic*  
  Feb 17: Book 5  
  Feb 19: Book 6: pp. 186-188 (484a – 484d), pp. 200-204 (496a – 499c)  
  Book 7: pp. 220-227 (514a – 521a), pp. 240- 244 (first paragraph)  
  (532a- 534e), and 250-251 (540a – end of book 7)  
  Book 8: pp. 252-277 (543a- 564a)  
  Book 9: pp. 289 (last paragraph)-297 (first paragraph) (574d-580c)

B. Freedom as Individual Choice

Feb 24 – 26
John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*  
  Feb 24: Chapter 1-4  
  Feb 26: Chapter 5  
  Locke, *Fundamental Constitution of Carolina*, §63-117*
Mar 3 – 5  John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*
Mar 3: Chapters 6-9
Mar 5: Chapter 19

Mar 10 - 12  Mar 10:  Review
              Mar 12:  Midterm Exam

** Discussion Sections do not meet Mar 13 **

Mar 16 – 20  Classes Suspended

C. Freedom as Association

Mar 24 – 26  Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Mar 24: Author’s introduction (pp. 11-26)
           Vol 1, Part 1, ch. 2 (pp 36-58)
           Vol 1, Part 1, ch. 3 (pp. 58-67)

Mar 26: Vol 1, Part 1, ch. 4-5 (pp. 68-115)
           Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 1 (pp. 201-202)
           Vol. 1, Part 2, ch. 4 (pp. 219-227)
           Vol. II, Part 2, ch. 7 (pp. 604-609)

Mar 31 – Apr 2  Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Mar 31: **Online Assignment: Associational Life in the US Today**
           Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 5 (pp. 228-235, 259-264 only)
           Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 6 (pp. 269-287)
Apr 2:  Vol. 1, Part 2, ch. 7 (pp. 287-305)
           Vol. 1, Part 2, ch. 9 (pp. 323-370)
           Vol. II, Part 2, ch. 1-5 (pp. 583-600)
           Vol. II, Part 2, ch. 8 (609-613)

Apr 7 – Apr 9  Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
Apr 7: Vol. II, Part 3, ch. 4 (pp. 661-662)
          Vol. II, Part 3, Ch. 21 (pp. 737-750)
          Vol. II, Part 4, ch. 1-2 (pp. 775-780)
          Vol. II, Part 4, chs. 6-7 (pp. 803-818)
Apr 9:  Apr 7: Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 10 (read pp. 370-426 only)

Apr 14 – 16  Apr 14: Review
             Apr 16: Midterm Exam

** Discussion sections do not meet Apr. 17 **
III. Challenging the Limits of Freedom

Apr 21-23  Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
            Apr 21: chs. 1-9 (pp. 19-70)
            Apr 23: chs. 10-11, appendix (pp. 71-128)

Apr 28 – 30  Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto
            Apr 28: Pages 61-80 (introduction and “Bourgeois and Proletarians”)
            Apr 30: Pages 81-94 (“Proletarians and Communists”)
            Paper Topics Distributed

May 5  Paper Consultations

Final Paper Due: Friday, May 15, 10:00am