RPOS 307: American Political Theory  
Spring 2015: Tracing America  
(9220)

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M/W 4:15-5:35  
Humanities 129  
Office Hours: W 1:00-3:00 (HU 016)

Course Description
This course is split into three sections. In the first part of the course, we will look at the founding of America. Primarily, we will examine the Federalist and the Anti-Federalist Papers, which will illuminate concepts such as democracy, citizenship, imagination, freedom, and the like. In the second section of the course, we will begin to trace the history of three concepts that are particularly important to America: charity (and how it relates to citizenship), individualism, and the good (specifically as it relates to the purpose of America and of its citizens). In this section, we will want to be particularly attentive to the way that the various thinkers’ conceptions of these concepts still inform the current political debate. Finally, we will wrap up the course by briefly examining just some of the varied ways that people conceptualize what it means to be on the left or the right of the American political spectrum. Throughout this course, we will examine what it means to be a citizen and how America has understood what politics is and how it should be done, but this final section of the course will allow us to tie some of these threads together. In a sense, then, this final section is a kind of capstone for the course.

Course Objectives
1) To understand how some of the important political concepts and ideas of the American political tradition were formed and how they evolved  
2) To understand how different thinkers used and transformed these concepts and ideas  
3) To connect these concepts and ideas to the contemporary political scene  
4) To better learn how to read complex texts and to comprehend the nuances within and among these difficult texts  
5) To better learn how to communicate difficult ideas and how to translate them into political practice

Course Requirements
- Arrive on time to all lectures.  
- Complete all readings on time.  
- Bring the assigned readings to class.  
- Come to class ready to participate. This requires you to not only read the assigned readings but to think about them in advance of the lecture. Be prepared to answer questions about the text and to ask questions of your own. It may help to take notes while you are reading, to underline key passages of the text, or to write down questions that you still have about the text.  
- Participate in class. This includes diligently listening to and respectfully responding to the instructor and your classmates as well as introducing your own thoughts.
• Complete one midterm exam and one final exam.

**Required Readings**
The following book is required for this course and is available at Mary Jane Books or online (please be sure to get the correct edition so we are, literally, all on the same page):


Additional readings will be made available online. They are marked with “*” in the “Schedule of Readings and Assignments” section of this syllabus.

**Attendance Policy**
Political theory is an activity not a formula. The process is at least as important as the result, which is to say it is impossible to understand the theory without understanding how the theory is put together. To understand how the theory works and moves, we will need to pick it up, mull it over, and try it out. This takes both time and conversation, which is the purpose of the class lectures and the resulting class discussions during our twice weekly meetings. If you miss class time, you will not be able to fully make up what you missed. As such, missing more than 1 class or repeatedly coming late to class will result in a reduction of your overall grade. (See below for the excused absences policy.)

**Office Hours**
Along those same lines, the conversations and musings do not need to stop in the classroom. I am always happy to further the discussion in my office hours, and, in fact, I encourage it. The more you can actively engage with the material, the better you will understand it. If your class schedule makes it impossible for you to meet with me during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

**Excused Absences:**
If you must miss more than one class or if you must miss a class with a scheduled exam, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) that details the reason for your absence and excuses you from that absence. Absent this proper documentation, your grade will be adversely affected.

In addition, if you know that you will miss class time (for an athletic event, a religious holiday, or the like), please bring these to my attention (with proper and official documentation) within the first 3 class meetings or, if that is not possible, as soon as you become aware of them.

**Grading**
Midterm: 35%
Final Exam: 40%
Participation: 25%

This course is graded on a scale of A-E.
**Exams:**
This class will have one midterm exam and one final exam. Both exams will be essay exams. Each exam will consist of one or two questions. Prior to the exam, I will distribute a sheet of paper that includes all possible exam questions. While the exam will not allow you to choose which question(s) you would like to answer, you will have every possible exam question available to you about one week before the exam is scheduled.

Since the thinkers in this course often self-consciously build on the work of their predecessors, the exams will be explicitly or implicitly cumulative. In other words, the questions will either ask you to talk about earlier thinkers from the course or they will require you to have knowledge of those earlier thinkers’ theories in order to properly contextualize and answer the questions being asked.

As per the "Excused Absence" policy outlined above, 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 as they are approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

**Participation:**
As I have already tried to make clear, participation is an important element for learning political theory. To emphasize this point, participation is worth 25% of your final grade.

You cannot receive full credit for participation if you do not come to class (see the unexcused and excused absences policies above), but attendance alone is not participation. You must contribute to the class discussion on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the semester. Participation includes asking questions that further the conversation, answering instructor or classmate questions, and offering appropriate comments to advance the classroom discussion. Though participation must be ongoing, I value quality participation over quantity alone.

**Disruptive Behavior:**
Participation includes not only actively adding to the academic discourse of the classroom, but it also includes not engaging in activity that is disruptive of that discourse. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, making loud or distracting noises, visually distracting students or the instructor, repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.

**Laptops and Electronic Devices:**
All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices must be silenced and stored out of sight for the duration of class time. Usage of laptops, iPads, or the like for any activity other than note taking is prohibited. Please see me after the first class if you anticipate taking notes on a laptop or similar device.
Grade Appeals:
In order to appeal an exam grade, you should see me during office hours within 2 weeks of receiving back the exam and submit a 1-2 page typewritten explanation of your reasons for believing that the grade should be changed. A grade appeal may result in the grade being raised, lowered, or left unaltered. After two weeks, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances such as a serious illness.

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 quotation 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](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

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, 518-442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations ([http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/disability/current.shtml)).

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.

Writing Center (Humanities 140)
The writing center provides tutorials on writing essays and improving language skills (ESL). Visit their website at: [http://www.albany.edu/writing/](http://www.albany.edu/writing/).

Academic Support Services (Library Room 94)
Academic support services arrange individual and group tutorials 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/oaae/index.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/oaae/index.shtml).
Schedule of Readings and Assignments
Reading selections not from required books will be made available online.
** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

Jan. 21 Introduction

I. Questions of Founding

Jan. 26 Kammen “Part One: Genesis of the U.S. Constitution 1776-1787” (Pay particular attention to the Articles of Confederation and the US Constitution) and the Declaration of Independence *

Jan. 28 Federalist Papers: 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15 (Kammen pg. 126-164)

Feb. 2 Federalist Papers: 16, 23, 37, 39 (Kammen pg. 164-186)

Feb. 4 Federalist Papers: 47, 48, 49, 51 (Kammen pg. 186-206)

Feb. 9 Federalist Papers: 62, 63, 70, 78, 84, 85 (Kammen pg. 206-250)

Feb. 11 Anti-Federalist Papers: Gerry, Mason, Yates and Lansing, and Federal Farmer (Kammen pg. 253-301)

Feb. 16 Anti-Federalist Papers: Federal Farmer (Kammen pg. 261-301)

Feb. 18 Anti-Federalist Papers: Brutus (Kammen pg. 301-360)

Feb. 23 Anti-Federalist Papers: Brutus (Kammen pg. 301-360)

Feb. 25 NO CLASS (USE THIS TIME TO REVIEW)

Mar. 2 Midterm Exam 1

II. Tracing Threads

II.A. CHARITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Mar. 4 Winthrop “A Model of Christian Charity;” Franklin “Compassion and Regard for the Sick” and “Brave Men at Fires” *

Mar. 9 Tocqueville Democracy in America (Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 1-9; Vol. 1, Part 2, Ch. 4; Vol. 2, Part 3, Ch. 13) *

Mar. 11 Tocqueville Democracy in America (Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 1-9; Vol. 1, Part 2, Ch. 4; Vol. 2, Part 3, Ch. 13) *

Mar. 16 NO CLASS SPRING BREAK
Mar. 18  NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

II.B. INDIVIDUALISM

Mar. 23  Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (Vol. 1, Part 2, Ch. 7; Vol. 2, Part 2, Ch. 10, 13, 14; Vol. 2, Part 4, Ch. 1-4, 6, 7) *

Mar. 25  Emerson “Self-Reliance” *

Mar. 30  Emerson “The American Scholar” *

II.C. PURPOSE OF AMERICA

Apr. 1  Winthrop “A Model of Christian Charity” *

Apr. 6  Whitman “Democratic Vistas” *

Apr. 8  Whitman “Song of Myself” *

Apr. 13  Whitman Wrap up

Apr. 15  Emerson “Experience” and “Circles” *

Apr. 20  Emerson “The Poet” *

Apr. 22  Emerson Wrap up

Apr. 27  Conwell “Acres of Diamonds” *

III.  LEFT AND RIGHT

Apr. 29  Roosevelt “Speech at Oglethorpe University” and “A Second Bill of Rights” and Rorty “A Cultural Left” *

May 4  Kirk “Ten Conservative Principles” and Eliot “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “The Literature of Politics” *

May 6  Semester Wrap up

Final Exam: Tuesday, May 12, 2015 3:30-5:30pm