Freedom and Politics

RPOS 103: Introduction to Political Theory
Spring 2016

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:45 p.m. – 4:05 p.m.
Lecture Hall 5
Lecturer: Mykolas Gudelis
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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, ideas, values, and language we use to understand our political life, evaluate and understand political institutions, and judge political practices. In this course, we will focus our attention on the notion of freedom in relation to democracy and politics more generally. Freedom and opposition to oppressive political forms have been central tenets of democracy from the times of antiquity to contemporary social movements. However, freedom is a complex, multifaceted, and sometimes paradoxical concept. As a source of danger, irrationality, and lawlessness, democratic freedom has been an object of critique by various political thinkers and actors. Some modern political institutions such as representative governance have been design to keep in check the “dangers” of freedom. Further, throughout the recent history the notion of freedom have often been a central claim of opposing ideologies such as Soviet communism and Western capitalism. At the same time, today’s military interventions in sovereign nations by Western powers are often justified with ideas of the “liberation” of people and the spread of freedom and democracy, while individual freedoms of citizens of Western countries are often threatened by the same institutions designed to protect them. In this complex political environment, how do we understand the concept of freedom?

Throughout the semester we will investigate how freedom relates to other political concepts such as agency; collectivity; individual; society; economic and social class; sovereignty; law; government. We will ask questions like the following: What does it mean to be free as a member of society? What are we free from, or what are we free to do? Is freedom related to equality? Is government a guarantor and protector of freedom or a threat to it? Is the law a tool of subjugation or an instrument for political freedom? Is freedom an ideology or a necessary condition for the existence of democratic society?

We will follow the historical continuum of the development of political ideas related to the notion of freedom from ancient Greek philosophers to early modern European thinkers to writers of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. We will engage with seminal texts of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Marx, J. S. Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, Hannah Arendt and Emma Goldman.

Learning Objectives
✓ To understand, apply and critically asses theoretical concepts, questions and arguments presented in major texts of western political theory.
✓ Learn to interpret political theory texts - their argument, style, and levels of meaning.
✓ To identify, evaluate and analyze competing ideas and definitions of political freedom.
✓ Be able to interpret main arguments, considering their historical and cultural context as well as their continued relevance.
To learn how to make well-reasoned persuasive arguments about political concepts and conditions based on the application of critical thinking.

*This course satisfies the general education requirements for Humanities*

**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:


In order to make some of the readings accessible to you without encountering additional costs various texts have been placed on-line on blackboard. This means you should print them out, read carefully and bring them to class as well as bring them to discussion sections. Reading them on line or on your electronic devices will not do it. Every student must acquire all texts or print out texts placed on blackboard, have them as a hard copy bring them to class.

**Course Requirements**

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

- Attend all lectures and discussion sections.
- Arrive to lectures and discussion sections on time.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date for lecture and discussion section.
- Contribute to a respectful academic environment refraining 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.
- Be an active listener during the lectures: take notes, ask questions, rise points of critique.

**Assignments**

You will have two in class exams (one mid-term and one final exam) and four short homework assignments, one for each section of the course. See the outline of the course for the exact exam dates. Short homework assignments will be in a form of a response to the question which will be posted on the blackboard on Friday. It will require a short, no more than two paragraph (half the page) answer. You will have to print out your answers, bring them to the class the following Tuesday and submit them to your TA’s at the end of the lecture before you leave the room. Remember, it is a political theory class. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. What is required is your own thinking, critical interpretation and close analysis of texts. You are required to demonstrate your own critical and analytical thinking. You will do well if these characteristics will be reflected in your homework assignments.

We will have exam review sessions before each exam however, you should be attending all discussion sections. These sections are important as they will allow you to analyze material more closely, discuss it with your TA’s and fellow students and clarify any questions you may have. I highly recommend you take an advantage of discussion sections by regularly attending them. They will help you to prepare for your exams. Regular attendance of discussion sections will add point to your overall course grade. You cannot pass the class if you do not attend sections.

**All written homework assignments should be typed up using Times New Roman, 12pt. size font, double spaced.**
Teaching Assistants and Office Hours:
The teaching assistants for this course are Yeufen Hsieh (yhsieh4@albany.edu) and Nels Frantzen (nfrantzen@albany.edu). You should feel free to see them in their office hours, talk to them after class, or write them e-mails. They will be happy to discuss the course material with you as well as help you with any problems you are having with the class. You should not feel any hesitation in engaging either the TAs or me in dialogue on the course material. You are also welcome to see me during my office hours: Tu/Th 4:05 - 5:05 in Humanities B16. In addition, I will be available to meet you outside these hours at the time convenient for you if you will schedule an appointment with me by e-mail at least two days in advance.

Blackboard:
As mentioned above, a good number of the readings are placed on Blackboard for your convenience and financial accessibility. Find the course, RPOS 103, Introduction to 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. I strongly recommend to download and print off the readings and bring them into lectures and your discussion sections. This way it is easier to analyze the actual text and key passages: mark, underline, make comments and so on.

Attendance
You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and discussion. Attendance will be taken in discussion sections. You should make arrangements with other students to share notes for missed classes. If you have an excused absence, make sure you do assigned readings first, then 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.**

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 exam: 30%.
Four short homeworks: 5% each. (20% all together)
Final exam (short essay): 30%
Discussion sections: 20%

Exams
Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through a midterm and final examination, both in class. Two 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.**

For more information on the University's Standards of Academic Integrity see:
http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml
**Discussion Sections**

Participation in discussion sections together with attendance is essential to your success and constitute 20% of your final grade. Attendance will be taken in every discussion section. But attendance alone is not sufficient to receive full credit for participation.

The greater the quality and quantity of your participation, the more rewarding the class will be for everyone. For every discussion section (as well as lecture if you wish so) be prepared with some contribution: a question, an interesting observation, and/or an opinion on the readings. Participation in discussion sections is the best place an time to bring questions about particular passages or key terms when the material is particularly difficult. You are strongly encouraged to participate in discussions by respectfully responding to your fellow students’ thoughts and opinions. Asking questions during the lecture or attending office hours with a TA or professor will also improve your overall course experience. Be an active participant in sections and lectures and not just a passive listener!

**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. Feel free to respectfully respond to other students’ arguments and engage in discussion. Your, in-lecture participation will add to discussion sections participation and will boost your grade overall. I encourage you to be an active participant in sections and 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 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. For more on University's Medical Excuse Policy see: [http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml](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](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.

**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.

**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](http://www.albany.edu/oass/support_services.htm) or contact them at 442-5180.

**Course Outline**

**Jan. 21th. Thursday**

  ** Discussion Sections do not meet Friday, January 22nd. **

**Part I**

**Two Freedoms**

**Jan. 26th. Tuesday**

  Read from part 1 to part 7 (pages 1-26)

**Jan. 28th. Thursday**

  Read from part 7 and part 8 (pages 26 -32)

  **Human Freedom and the Realm of Politics**

**Feb. 2nd. Tuesday**

*Short homework due. Submit it to your TA's after the lecture before you leave the room*

Feb. 4th. Thursday
  Read parts 3, 4 and 5 (pages: 36 - 46)

  Part II

  Ancient Democracy And Early Critiques of Democratic Freedom

Feb. 9th. Tuesday
- Paul Cartledge, "Democratic politics ancient and modern: from Cleisthenes to Mary Robinson," Hermathena, No. 166 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-29. (On blackboard)

Feb. 11th. Thursday

Feb. 16th. Tuesday
- Plato, The Republic, Book IV

Feb. 18th. Thursday
- Plato, The Republic, Book V

Feb. 23rd. Tuesday
Plato, The Republic, Book VIII. From the beginning of the book VIII (543a) to 557a.

Feb. 25th. Thursday

March 1st. Tuesday
  *Short answer homework due. Submit it to your TA's after the lecture before you leave the room*

March 3rd. Thursday

March 8th. Tuesday
- Exam Review

March 10th. Thursday
MID TERM EXAM - 1
**Discussion sections do not meet March 11th **

*********************** March 15th - 18th No Classes. Spring Break***********************
Part III

Liberal Beginnings: Freedom, and Political Authority

March 22nd. Tuesday

March 24th. Thursday

March 29th. Tuesday

March 31st. Thursday

April 5th. Tuesday

April 7th. Thursday
• Review of the part III of the course: questions and discussion.
*Short homework due. Submit it to your TA's after the lecture before you leave the room*

Part IV


April 12th. Tuesday
• Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," Benjamin Constant, Political Writings, pp. 309-328.(On blackboard)

April 14th. Thursday
• James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*. No. 10 (On blackboard)

April 19th. Tuesday
• John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. Chapter 4 "Of the Limits of the Authority of Society over the Individual." (pages 69 - 86) (On blackboard)

April 21st. Thursday
• Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol 2 part2.*, chapter 7 "Of the Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects." Pages: 402 - 427 (On blackboard)
*Short homework due. Submit it to your TA's after the lecture before you leave the room*

Modern Freedom Rethought

April 26, Tuesday
Emma Goldman. "Anarchism and Other Essays" Chapter 5 "Patriotism: A menace to Liberty." (On blackboard)

April 28th, Thursday
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels "The Communist Manifesto" Read Introduction and "Bourgeois And Proletariats"

**May 3rd. Tuesday**
Final exam review

**May 12th. Thursday**
FINAL EXAM WILL TAKE PLACE ON THURSDAY, MAY 12TH FROM 8:00AM to 10:00AM