RPOS 103: Introduction to Political Theory (11500)
Fall 2010

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T/TH 2:45-4:05
Lecture Center 7
Office Hours: HU B16
Tues. 12:30-2:30 & by appt.

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 what counts as politics, i.e. which elements of society should be considered political.
3) To learn how to read closely and interpret political texts.
4) To learn how to make well-reasoned, persuasive arguments, written and oral.

This course fulfills the General Education requirement in the category of Europe. Students will be able to demonstrate:
1) an understanding of the variety of cultures, regions, and countries that make up Europe.
2) knowledge of the distinctiveness of Europe as manifested in the development of diverse histories, institutions, economies, societies, and cultures
3) knowledge of the relationship between Europe and other regions of the world as expressed through political, economic, and cultural contact
4) an understanding of how the knowledge that becomes the basis of historical inquiry is constructed

Course Description
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? As 20th century political theorist Hannah Arendt teaches us, thinking about such political questions is a job not just for scholars, but for all citizens in a democracy. For Arendt, it is nothing less than a necessary safeguard against political evils like totalitarianism.

In the first half, we will read three influential thinkers in western political thought: Plato, Machiavelli, and Tocqueville. Each one represents a distinctive way of thinking about politics, offering a new vocabulary for describing politics, innovative ways of interpreting political history, and a new set of hopes and fears for the future. Each also theorizes a key political concept: Justice (Plato), Power (Machiavelli), and Democracy (Tocqueville). In the second half, we consider what makes an idea, an action, or an issue worthy of being called political. With Aristotle and Locke, we ask: what makes a citizen? With Locke and Marx, we ask: how does economics affect the meaning of equality and justice? With Wollstonecraft and Douglass, we ask: how do identities like gender and race affect the meaning of freedom and democracy?
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 and at Mary Jane Books (corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street):

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Signet Classic)
- John Locke, *The Political Writings* (Hackett)
- Niccolo Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings* (Hackett)
- Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* (Signet Classic)
- Plato, *Republic* (Cambridge University Press)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Penguin)

On-line readings will be made available on-line through Blackboard (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. Every student must acquire all texts and read assignments, no exceptions.

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.
- Complete all assignments and exams by the deadline listed on the syllabus.

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.**

Reminder: Discussion sections will meet the first week of class. They will not meet this term on the following dates: Fri, Sept 10, Fri, after 2:35 on Sept 17, and Fri Nov 26.

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?

Students will be assessed in the course based on the following criteria:

- **Midterm Exams (2):** 30%
- **Paper:** 25%
- **Discussion Section:** 15%
- **Final Exam:** 30%

Final grading for the course will take improvement into account.

**Exams:** Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through midterm and final exams. Exams will consist of identifications and/or in-class essays. Identifications assess your ability to understand major arguments from the texts by identifying a passage from the assigned readings, interpreting its meaning, and explaining its significance. In-class essays ask you to formulate your own argument in response to a question and defend it using evidence from readings and lectures. The final exam will test you on material from readings and lectures from the entire semester.

No make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given, except in the event of serious personal or family illness or other extraordinary circumstances approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

**Papers:** A short paper will give you the opportunity to develop an argument based on a careful analysis of 1-2 political theory text(s). You will be asked to respond to a question (from a choice of at least two) and support your argument through evidence from assigned readings. You must cite all of the passages or ideas taken from other authors. The paper is meant as a means of evaluating your skills in textual interpretation, so no research beyond the assigned texts is required. Citing non-academic sources especially from the internet, is strongly discouraged, generally resulting in a lower grade.

You must submit two copies of your paper: 1) on paper at the beginning of class on the due date; and 2) electronically through Blackboard’s Safe Assign, a program that evaluates the originality of written work. The purpose of SafeAssign is to guard against academic dishonesty by judging whether essays draw from sources without citation. For more information on SafeAssign, see [http://www.albany.edu/its/bls/safe_assign.htm](http://www.albany.edu/its/bls/safe_assign.htm).

**Opportunity to revise papers:** Within a week from the time the paper was handed back you will have the option to rewrite the paper, though there is no guarantee that your grade will improve. The two grades will be averaged together. The option to rewrite does not mean the first paper can be a rough draft – it must be your best work at the moment. Rough drafts will be handed back without a grade and you will forego the rewrite option. These optional revisions must be handed in no later than a week from the time you received the paper back.

**Discussion Section:** Worth 15% 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. These include the 3x5 card due Sept. 3 as well as the on-line plagiarism tutorial due Oct. 7. 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.

Grading Appeals
If you would like 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. After two weeks, grade complaints will not be considered unless there are mitigating circumstances like a serious illness. Appealing a grade does not guarantee a grade increase – the grade may be raised, lowered, or left as is, go up, depending on the results of the review.

Improvement
Marked improvement over the term will be taken into consideration in computing course grades.

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 in advance.

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 please also inform the instructor as soon as possible. In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from religious observance. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor's attention as soon as possible. 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 Blackboard for each assigned reading. These questions are meant to help you better understand the readings and focus on the 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 gain 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 (e.g. you will also compare readings, apply theories to political situations, develop your own critique of concepts, etc.) in discussion sections, lectures, and assignments.

**Visit Office Hours**

Professor office hours will be held for two hours each week. You are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to discuss material in lectures, other questions related to political theory, and seek advice on academic success. If you are unable to attend the scheduled office hours due to a conflict with another class, e.g., it is easy to arrange an alternative time to meet.

**Teaching Assistants**

There are three teaching assistants (TAs) for this course: Onur Bilginer (ob888933@albany.edu), Vincent Commissio (vin64eu@gmail.com), and Daniel Kuchler (dk582569@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, sharpen arguments, and improve your writing. Take advantage of their expertise! You are encouraged to visit TAs in office hours to raise questions about lecture, discussion sections and/or grading.

**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, or submitting your own work from another course. The purpose of papers and exams is for you to show how you have developed your own arguments from assigned texts. Whenever you are using the ideas of others, they must be clearly attributed to their source. For the purposes of this course, most of the work you do will be in developing your own ideas, not conducting research into other viewpoints.

You will be required to complete the library’s on-line tutorial on plagiarism for this course. A record of your completion will be sent to the professor. Even if you have completed it in the past, you must do so for this course specifically. 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
**This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class.**

I. Why study political theory?

A. Thinking and Politics
   • Tues, Aug. 31: Introduction
     • 3x5 cards handed out for in-class assignment due Sept. 3
   • Thurs, Sept. 2: Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 3-8 **
     Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 1 (read this chapter very carefully)
     *** NO CLASS MEETING ***

*** You must attend discussion section on Fri., September 3 having read Bk 1, *Republic***
   • In-class Assignment: Submit a 3-5 card with your picture attached (photocopies, computer print-out are OK; glue, tape or staple to attach). Write the following information on it: name, year, major (or intended), related coursework, email address. Due in discussion section Friday, Sept. 3

II. What is political theory?

A. Plato: What is justice? How can a polity attain the good life collectively?
   • Tues, Sept. 7: *Republic*, Bk 2, Bk. 3: read only 413c/p. 106 – end of bk. 3, Bk. 4
   • Thurs, Sept. 9: No class

*** No Friday discussion sections on Sept. 10 ***

   • Tues, Sept. 14: *Republic*, Bk. 5
   • Thurs, Sept 16: Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 6

*** No Friday discussion sections after 2:35 pm on Sept. 17. If your section is cancelled, you are encouraged to attend an earlier section for one week only. Consult with your TA to arrange an appropriate alternative. ***

   • Tues, Sept 21: Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 7

B. Machiavelli: What is power? What makes a polity endure over time?
   • Thurs, Sept 23: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 1-10
   • Tues, Sept 28: *The Prince*, chs. 11-24
   • Thursday, Sept 30: *The Prince*, chs. 25-26

*** Tues Oct 5: Midterm #1 ***
C. Tocqueville: What is democracy? Can the people rule well?

- Thurs Oct 7: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*:
  - Author’s introduction (pp 11-26) and Vol. 1, Part 1, ch. 2 (all), ch. 3 (only pp. 66-67), ch. 4 (all),
  - **On-line Tutorial on plagiarism**: Complete the tutorial on plagiarism offered through the university library. Go to "library.albany.edu" Follow links to ‘tutorials’ to ‘plagiarism 101’ to ‘credit’. The library will issue a report to the professor confirming that you completed the tutorial. 
  - **Complete by Tues, Oct 7.**
  - **Paper Topics handed out**

- Tues Oct 12: *Democracy in America*
  - note: page selections within chapters refer to the subsections. Therefore, begin reading from the subheading and continue only until the section ends on the final page of the selection, i.e. no need to read orphaned bits of text before or after subsections
  - ch. 5 (only pp. 72-74, 80-82, and 108-115), ch. 6 (only pp. 116-122)
  - Vol. I, Part 2: ch. 1 (all), ch. 4 (all), ch. 5 (only pp. 228-231), ch. 6 (only pp. 277-287), ch. 9 (only pp. 365-370)
  - also recommended: ch. 6 (pp 185-191)

- Thurs Oct 14: *Democracy in America*
  - Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 10 (only pp. 370-426)
  - Also recommended: Pt. 2, ch. 3 and Vol. II, Part 1, ch. 9

- Tues Oct 19: *Democracy in America*
  - Vol. II, Part 2, chs. 1-2 (all), chs. 4-5 (all)
  - Vol. II, Part 3, ch. 4 (all)
  - Vol. II, Part 4, ch. 1 (all), chs. 6-7 (all)
  - Also recommended: Vol. II, Part 2, chs. 6-7

- Thurs, Oct 21 *Democracy in America*: No reading assigned

**Thursday, Oct 21: Paper #1 due**

III. What is political?

A. What makes a citizen?

- Tues Oct 26: Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. 1, Bk. 2.1 **

- Thurs, Oct 28: *Politics*, Bk. 3, Bk. 4.1-3**

- Tues, Nov. 2: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1-7

- Thurs, Nov 4: *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 8-9, 15, 18-19
B. Political Economy: How do economic relations translate into political power?
   • Thurs, Nov 11: Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, Prefaces and Part I (pp. 31-76)
   • Tues, Nov. 16: *Communist Manifesto*, Pt. II – end (pp. 77-91)

Thursday, Nov 18: Midterm #2

C. Political Identity: How do social identities translate into political power?
   • Tues, Nov 23, Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, introduction and ch. 1 **
   • Thurs, Nov. 25: *No Class*
   • Tues, Nov. 30: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ch. 2 **
   • Thurs, Dec. 2, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, chs. 1-9
   • Tues, Dec 7: *Narrative*, chs. 10-11
     • Sample essay questions for Final Exam handed out in class

*** Final Exam: Friday, December 17, 1:00 – 3:00pm ***