Introduction to Political Theory
RPOS 103Y – 0001
Freedom and Politics

*This course satisfies the general education requirements for Humanities*

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:45 a.m. – 1:05 p.m.
Room: LC 22
Lecturer: Mykolas Gudelis
Political Science Department
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:05 p.m. – 2:05 p.m.
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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 discern political phenomena, evaluate and understand political institutions, and judge political practices. In this course, we will focus on the notion of freedom in the context of politics.

Historically, the question of freedom lies at the very heart of political theory. As such, freedom is a complex, multifaceted, and often a paradoxical concept. In this course we will investigate how freedom relates to various political notions such as agency; identity; collectivity; individual; class; sovereignty; law; equality; the state. We will ask questions like the following: What does it mean to be free as a member of society and a member of a particular political community? What does it mean to be politically free? Does freedom entail obligations and duties or rights only? What are we free from, or what are we free to do? What is a relationship between freedom and political resistance? Is freedom related to equality? Is there a relationship between freedom and property? Can representative governance be a source of political freedom and democracy? Is government a protector of freedom or a threat to it? Is freedom simply an ideology or a necessary condition for the existence of democratic society?

We will follow the historical continuum of the development of ideas related to the notion of freedom in politics: from antiquity, to early modernity, to contemporary political thought.

Learning Objectives

✓ To understand and be able able critically evaluate and argumentatively utilize concepts, key questions and main arguments presented in major texts of Western political theory.
✓ Learn to interpret political theory texts – their arguments, style, and different levels of meaning.
✓ To identify, evaluate and analyze competing ideas and definitions of political freedom.

Required Readings
Throughout this course, we will be using one book, an anthology that contains key texts of Western political thought. This book is mandatory for this course, and it is available for purchase at the university bookstore: The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought: Essential Readings. Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Texts. Ed. Andrew Bailey, et al. Broadview Press, 2012.
Additional texts have been placed online on Blackboard. You should print them out, read them carefully, and bring them to lectures and especially to your sections in order to discuss them with your TA’s and fellow students. Reading from your electronic devices will not suffice and at the end of the course it will interfere with your understanding of course material and subsequently your success in the course overall.

*Make sure you visit blackboard frequently to keep up to date with all the required readings and updates.

**Course Requirements**

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

- Attend all lectures.
- Arrive to lectures on time.
- Attend all discussion sections in an engaging fashion: come prepared, ask questions, rise points of critique, discuss certain aspects of readings with your TA’s and fellow students.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date, and come to lectures prepared.
- Contribute to a respectful academic environment, refraining from unrelated conversations or use of technology.
- Bring assigned readings to class with you.
- Be an active listener during the lectures: take notes, ask questions, raise points of critique.

**Assignments and discussion sections**

There will be two in-class exams (one mid-term and one final exam) and six short, essay type homework assignments. Your final exam will take place on the final day of classes. See the outline of the course for the exact exam midterm and final exam dates. Short homework assignments will be in a form of a response to a question, which will be e-mailed to you. Make sure you check your SUNY e-mail regularly! Your answers will require a short, 2.5 – 3 page (no more than 3 pages) academic essay form answer. You will have to print out your answers, and hand them in (a hard copy) to your TA’s on the following Tuesday at the end of the class. Remember, it is a political theory course. 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 aspects will be reflected in your homework assignments. There will be 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.

**All written homework assignments should be typed up using Times New Roman, 12pt. size font, double spaced, pages numbered and stapled. Each assignment should have your first and last name, course title and number and professors name. You should copy and paste the actual question you will be engaging with before writing your answers.**

**Teaching Assistants and Office Hours**

Teaching assistants and the people who will lead discussion sections in this course are Nels Frantzen (nfrantzen@albany.edu) and Nathaniel Williams (ncwilliams@albany.edu) They are experienced teacher assistants and graduate student scholars, both of whom are proficient in Western political theory and themes of the course. They are your best support and companions during this course. You should feel free to see them during their office hours, talk to them after class, or contact them by e-mail if you have any questions. They will be happy to discuss course material with you as well as help you with any problems you are may be having in this course. Their office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30am – 11:30am and 1:30pm – 2:30pm. You also, should not feel any hesitation to contact me directly. I will do my best to meet with you at the time most convenient with you and outside of my
regular office hours if you contact me by e-mail at least two days in advance. Otherwise, you are always welcome to see me during my office hours: 1:05 p.m. – 2:05 p.m. Humanities, B 16.

**Discussion Sections**

Participation in discussion sections together with attendance is essential to your success in the course. Attendance will be taken in every discussion section. The greater the quality and quantity of your participation, the more rewarding the class will be for everyone. Participation in discussion sections is the best place and 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!

**Blackboard:**

As mentioned above, a number of readings is placed on Blackboard. Short homework assignments will also be posted on Blackboard in addition to being e-mailed to your “suny.edu” electronic mailboxes. Make sure you check blackboard regularly for course updates, changes and announcements.

**Attendance**

You are responsible for all material covered in both: lectures and discussion sections. *Attendance will be taken in discussion sections.* You should make arrangements with other students to share notes for any lectures or discussion sections that you miss. If you have an excused absence, make sure you do assigned readings first before you come to see me or your TA to discuss missed material.

**Missing more than 2 discussion sections 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, Wikipedia or similar, and "reworking them" will also earn you an E along with further disciplinary 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. Any attempt to plagiarize in this course will be taken very, very seriously.

**Course grade breakdown**

Midterm exam: 15%
Five short homework assignments: 10% each. (50% all together)
Final exam: 25%
Discussion sections (attendance and participation): 10%

**Exams**

Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through a midterm and final examination, both in-class, pen and paper, “blue book” type of examination. Both exams will have in them combination of short and longer, essay type questions as well as quote recognition question.
**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

**Voluntary presentations**

There will be an opportunity to present on the readings of your choice for those who would be interested in an exercise of orally articulating and presenting their analysis of readings of your choice. These presentations are not mandatory nor will they be evaluated, but they are a great opportunity to practice for future conference presentations and variety of academic debates if you are interested in continuing your academic career into a graduate level.

**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 hand and asking questions. Feel free to respectfully respond to other students’ arguments and engage in a discussion. 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

**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 factor for success is completing assigned readings and regular attendance in lectures and discussion sections. 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 or contact them at 442-5180.

Course Outline

Part I

What is Political Theory?

Jan. 24th Tuesday
- Introduction. Course and syllabus overview.
- What is political theory?
** Discussion Sections do not meet Friday, January 27th. **

Jan. 26th Thursday
What is Polis?

Jan. 31st Tuesday
What is Theoria?

Part I

Two Freedoms

Feb. 2nd Thursday
Negative Freedom
- Herodotus. Histories. Pages 207; 208; 209. (On blackboard)

First homework question announced.
Feb. 7th Tuesday

Positive Freedom

- Submit your 1st homework

Feb. 9th Thursday


Feb. 14th Tuesday


Feb. 16th Thursday


Feb. 21st Tuesday


Part II

Ancient Democracy and Philosophical Critiques of Democratic Freedom

Ancient Democracy and Political Freedom

Feb. 23rd Thursday

- Paul Cartledge, "Democratic politics ancient and modern: from Cleisthenes to Mary Robinson," *Hermathena*, No. 166 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-29. (On blackboard)
- Thucydides, “Pericles Funeral Oration” (On blackboard)
- Second homework announced

Feb. 28th Tuesday

- Aristotle, Constitution of Athens. Parts 5 - 30. (On blackboard)
- Submit your second homework

Mar. 2nd Thursday


Mar. 7th Tuesday


Mar. 9th Thursday

• Third homework announced

*********************** March 14th - 16th No Classes. Spring Break***********************

Mar. 21st Tuesday
• Midterm exam review
• Submit your third homework

Mar. 23rd Thursday
MID TERM EXAM - 1
**Discussion sections do not meet March 24th **

Part III
Freedom, and Sovereignty

Mar. 28th Tuesday

Mar. 30th Thursday
• Fourth homework announced

April 4th Tuesday
• Submit your fourth homework

April 6th Thursday

April 11th Tuesday

April 13th Thursday
• Fifth homework announced
April 18th Tuesday
• Submit your fifth homework

Part IV
Freedom and Modernity

April 20th Thursday
• Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," Benjamin Constant, Political Writings, pp. 309-328. (On blackboard)

April 25th Tuesday

April 27th Thursday

May 2nd Tuesday

May 4th Thursday
• Final exam review

May 9th Tuesday
FINAL EXAM. Exam will take place at the same location and time as course lectures.