

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A. Department Information:

Division: Social Science
Department: Political Science
Course ID: POLIT 110
Course Title: Introduction to Political Theory
Units: 3
Lecture: 3 hours
Laboratory: none
Pre/Corequisite: none

B. Catalog and Schedule Description:

This course surveys Western political thought from classical times to the contemporary period, and explores such controversial political questions as the nature of justice, the morality of political deception and violence, the proper limits of governmental power, the virtues (and challenges) of political diversity, and the future of the bourgeois state.

II. NUMBER OF TIMES THE COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- A. Explain the contributions of some outstanding political theorists in the Western tradition;
- B. Compare and contrast historical contexts, by reviewing the concrete political, social, and personal circumstances that motivated them;
- C. Read and critically evaluate interpretations of these theorists, and express conclusions in the appropriate scholarly format;
- D. Develop his or her personal ideas of politics by confronting the issues raised by the theorists studied.

IV. COURSE CONTENT:

A. What Political Theory is all about.

- 1. Definition: the (possibly unavailing) attempt to ascertain what is good and bad, right and wrong, proper and improper, in politics.
- 2. As a branch of political science: concerned with ultimate ends and the nature of the political process.
- 3. As a branch of philosophy: concerned with the practical expression of social ideals in institutions and practices.

B. An overview of Western Political Thought.

- 1. The classical era – the polis, justice, aristocracy, democracy, tyranny – Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Old and New Testaments.
- 2. The medieval period – the two swords, philosophies of representation – Augustine, Aquinas, John of Salisbury.

3. The early modern era – political realism, sovereignty, individualism, the idea of the state – Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes.
 4. Bourgeois liberalism – the social contract, property, human rights, the rightist reaction – Locke, Rousseau, Jefferson, Smith, Burke, Mill.
 5. The Marxist challenge – materialism, the class struggle, exploitation, alienation – Marx, Engels, Lenin, Bernstein, Sorel.
 6. Postmodern politics – anti-foundationalism, the end of history, the rise of “marginalized” groups – Fanon, Foucault, Fukuyama, Huntington.
- C. Critically Read a Text.
1. Essentialist reading – the meaning of a text is found through analysis of the abstract terms of its argument.
 2. Contextual reading – the meaning of a text is found in its relationship to a structure of power in society.
- D. An in-depth discussion of four to six theorists, representative of different time periods, including (as relevant) the following elements.
1. What the theorist said: an exposition of leading works and ideas of the theorist in question.
 2. Intellectual influences on the theorist: how does the theorist’s work relate to previous ideas of politics?
 3. Psychological influences: how did the personal quirks and traumas of the theorist’s life affect his or her ideas?
 4. Practical political influences: how did the theorist’s ideas relate to the political issues and struggles of his or her time?
 5. The influence of the theorist: how has the theorist’s work affected the development of Western political thought?
 6. Current importance: how do the theorist’s ideas relate to the political issues and struggles of the present day (if they do)?
 7. Permanent importance: what enduring contribution (if any) has the theorist made to our understanding of politics?

V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. The student will be required to read and to show familiarity with written materials of various kinds, including primary texts, survey texts, historical texts, and critical texts, as explained (under VI. A.) below.
- B. Since the comparison and clarification of political ideas is the essence of this course, the free interchange of different viewpoints in class will be fostered in at least one of the following ways:
 1. Students may be required to make individual (or group) oral presentations, and answer questions from the class.
 2. Students may be required to engage in structured debates on controversial topics arising out of the readings.
 3. The instructor will promote open-ended, free-flowing class discussions by (for example) asking thought-provoking questions.

- C. The traditional lecture format may be utilized to present information regarding the views of the theorists under review, and the historical circumstances surrounding their work.
- D. Other instructional media – videos, computer simulations, role-playing games, artistic representations, etc. – may be utilized, at the discretion of the instructor.

VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Reading assignments could be any of the following:
 1. Selections from primary texts – works by the theorists being studied (Plato, Aristotle, etc.).
 2. Survey texts, covering part or all of the Western political tradition.
 3. Historical/biographical texts, providing background material on the relevant historical periods and the lives of the theorists.
 4. Critical texts, analyzing the works of one or more theorists.
- B. Writing Assignments (and oral presentations):
 1. At the discretion of the instructor, writing assignments and oral presentations may take any of the following forms:
 - a. Expository papers, in which the emphasis is on explaining the views of a theorist.
 - b. Historical/psychological papers, in which the emphasis is on discussing contextual aspects of a theorist's work.
 - c. Impressionistic papers, in which the student confronts some aspect of a theorist's work on a personal level, or applies the theorist's ideas to current political concerns.
 - d. Critical/scholarly papers, in which the student analyzes some academic critique of the theorist's work, utilizing the proper scholarly apparatus (footnotes, etc.).
 2. Writing assignments (and oral presentations) may be of any length, from brief, summary statements to full-length discussions.
- C. Examples:
 1. Reading Assignments:
 - a. Read the *Apology* of Socrates, noting how Socrates' defense of philosophical inquiry differs from the modern justifications for freedom of speech (primary text).
 - b. Read Chapter 4 of McClelland's *History of Western Political Thought*, and note how Cicero modified classical Greek ideas to fit the Roman situation (survey text).
 - c. Read pp. 316-384 of Finer's *History of Government, Volume I*, and note how the situation of the classical Greek *polis* differed from that of a modern nation-state (historical text).
 - d. Read Chapter 4 of de Grazia's *Machiavelli in Hell*, and note the sorts of acts Machiavelli considers evil (critical texts).
 2. Writing Assignments (and oral presentations):
 - a. Explain the idea of political individualism, as it appears in the works of Hobbes (expository).

- b. Explain how the rise of the bourgeoisie in 17th century England shaped the political theory of Locke (historical).
- c. Would you like to live in Rousseau's ideal state, as described in the *Social Contract* (impressionistic)?
- d. Does Read's analysis in *Power versus Liberty* give adequate weight to the libertarian strain in Jefferson's political thought (critical/scholarly)?

VII. EVALUATION:

- A. Methods of Evaluation include one or more of the following:
 - 1. Writing assignments and oral presentations
 - 2. Essay examinations – to measure a student's comprehension of complex ideas.
 - 3. Multiple choice and true/false quizzes – to measure the student's grasp of specific facts, and make sure the reading is being done. A student's grade will not be entirely based on such quizzes, but must also involve some combination of the first two methods.
- B. Frequency of Evaluation:
 - 1. Students will be evaluated at least three times during the semester.
- C. Typical exam questions:
 - 1. Essay examinations.
 - a. Discuss the principal similarities and differences between the economic theories of Adam Smith and Karl Marx.
 - b. If Alexander Hamilton were alive today, would he probably be a liberal or a conservative?
 - 2. Multiple choice examinations.
 - a. The first expression of the "interest group" theory of politics is found in *Federalist #10* by
 - (a) Hamilton.
 - (b) Madison.
 - (c) Jay.
 - (d) Hamilton and Jay working together.
 - b. From the philosophy of Hegel, Marx derived the idea of
 - (a) exploitation.
 - (b) radical socialism.
 - (c) individualism.
 - (d) the dialectic.
 - 3. True/False examinations.
 - a. Fanon believed that political violence is never justified (T/F).
 - b. Huntington's analysis in *The Clash of Civilizations* implies that a true global community is impossible (T/F).

VIII. TYPICAL TEXTS:

- A. Primary Texts such as:

- a. Allan Bloom (trans.). *The Republic of Plato* (2nd edition). New York: Basic Books, 1991.
- b. George Bull (trans.). *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- c. Clinton Rossiter (ed.), new introduction & notes by Charles R. Kesler. *The Federalist Papers* by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. New York: New American Library, 1999.
- d. Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

B. Survey texts, such as:

- a. Judith A. Best. *The Mainstream of Western Political Thought*. New York: University Press of America, 1997.
- b. John S. McClelland. *A History of Western Political Thought*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- c. Brian R. Nelson. *Western Political Thought: From Socrates to the Age of Ideology*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1995.

C. Historical works, such as:

- a. S. E. Finer. *The History of Government* (three volumes). London: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- b. Sarah B. Pomeroy (ed.) *et. al.* *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- c. Birdsall S. Viault. *Modern European History*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990.

D. Critical works, such as:

- a. Richard Hamilton. *Marxism, Revisionism, and Leninism: Explication, Assessment, and Commentary*. Westport, CT; Greenwood, 2000.
- b. Sebastian DeGrazia. *Machiavelli in Hell*. New York: Random House Inc., 1991.
- c. Steven Johnson. *Encountering Tragedy: Rousseau and the Project of Democratic Order*. Ithaca, NY; Cornell University Press, 1999.
- d. James H. Read. *Power Versus Liberty: Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, and Jefferson*. Charlottesville; University Press of Virginia, 2000.

IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

None.