

Course Description

The LSA Theme Semester for Fall 2010 is “What Makes Life Worth Living?” This course explores the question from the perspective of Western political theory. This way, the course serves as a chronological introduction to the theoretical study of politics.

**What makes
life worth
living?**

The texts we read are (mostly) old, but the questions should be familiar: **How should we live, and what rules should govern our collective life?** Those are, roughly, the questions of the *good life* and *justice*. **How should we go about pursuing our goals?** That is the question of *political action*. Finally, **why do we disagree when we answer those questions?** That’s the question of *ideology*.

Political theory focuses on analyzing and interpreting concepts and arguments. That’s one of the reasons it makes perfect sense to read ancient texts to think about current problems: even when the ideas aren’t applicable, your engagement with the ideas gives you skills to think about our own burning questions.

Your most important assignment in this course is to apply the tools of political theory to this course: figure out ways of categorizing and conceptualizing the ideas we encounter, think about how they apply and fail to apply to the problems of our time, and develop skills to explain your discoveries to others.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the semester, you should:

1. Be **familiar** with the texts we have read and the kinds of arguments you have encountered during the course.
2. Have an **understanding** of what political theory is and have at least a general comprehension of major themes and concepts in political theory (e.g., you should know in more than one way what liberalism and conservatism are).
3. Be able to read other similar texts and **analyze** other political arguments. In other words, you should be able to engage in inquiry into political arguments. For example, you should be able to understand what is wrong with a logically

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fallacious argument and at the same time understand why it might work to get people riled up.

4. Be able to **express** your views on these matters both verbally, in writing, and using other “new” media, both individually and by working in groups.
5. Be able to **solve problems**, both intellectual and social, using the skills and knowledge you’ve acquired in this course in conjunction with other skills and knowledge you might have from elsewhere.

Course Requirements

People learn in different ways, and they bring different skills and background knowledge to the courses they take. This course is designed with those ideas in mind. That means two things: One, we will frequently ask you think about what you have learned, and how. Two, there are many different ways of satisfying the requirements of the course, many involving the particular skills and interests you might have.

To do well in this course, do the following:

1. **Take initiative.** Your choice of assignments, finding group partners, getting credit for participation require proactive decisions on your part. That’s the way the political world works, too. In doing that...
2. **leverage your own talents.** None of us are good at everything; all of us are good at something. You know and can do more things than you might realize. Choose assignments with that in mind. But also...
3. **take on challenges.** You will face new and difficult things: texts, assignments, people. So also in life. We will reward risk taking. But, finally, you must
4. **work hard.** We know that “A for effort” went out by the second grade, but while hard work is not a *sufficient* condition for a good grade — that means it alone won’t get you a good grade — it’s a *necessary* condition. That is, you can’t get a good grade if you haven’t made a serious effort to read, attend, participate, and create.

Because of the flexibility of the assignments, the grading structure for this course may at first seem complicated. Please read the material carefully so you understand it.

Assignment Structure & Scoring

Many of you have played video games. Think of the assignments and their scoring in this course along a gaming logic. Games often have **multiple dimensions** on which you can earn points and **multiple kinds of activities** which you may engage in. So also in this course. You will need to collect **experience points** and **skill points**.

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The key principles of the assignments in the course are:

- There is no “A for effort” in college — **but there is “B for effort” in this course!** If you make a good-faith effort to complete the assignments, even if you don’t do so well on them, you’ll get a B range grade.
- You’ll have options on which kinds of assignments to do; you don’t have to do everything. **In fact, doing everything is not in your interest because it won’t help raise your grade.** Although the possible total for experience points is 230, you can only count 200 experience points toward your course grade.
- Although it’s easy to pass this course with a decent grade, it is also easy to do really poorly if you stop making an effort. Please don’t do that.

And here are the details:

Readings and reading quizzes

The readings for this course are frequently very difficult. We know they are, and our goal is to help you understand and engage them. You need to complete the reading for the day before the lecture; for each lecture, **you will need to answer a few questions online** and complete your answers by 8 a.m. the morning of the lecture.

Those questions help you think about the readings, and they allow us to gauge your difficulties with them.

Everything listed below is required:

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, third edition, translated by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 2000).

Wootton, David, ed. *Modern Political Thought from Machiavelli to Nietzsche* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1996).

Additional required readings are available through the CTools site for the course.

Lectures

The lectures are going to be largely interactive, thanks to the LectureTools software. Attendance in lectures is optional; participation during lectures is rewarded.

LectureTools allows you to take notes during class, interact with the instructors, as well as store your notes for further study.

Experience Points:

2 points for each time you fill out a reading quiz before a lecture.

Max points:

50 points

Skill points:

None

Experience Points:

1 point for each lecture you participate in, either via LectureTools or verbally in class

Max points:

20 points

Skill points:

None

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Discussion Sections

Discussion sections are, in many ways, the most important part of the course. That's where you get to sharpen your understanding of the texts and ideas, try out and practice your own ideas, and engage others in discussions. It is very important to attend and *participate* in discussion sections regularly — that means, every time.

The purpose of the discussion sections is *not* to explain the lecture, but to focus on the ideas of the texts and the lecture, analyze them, and take them further. Your GSI will arrange this in many ways: there can be discussions, group discussions, in-class writing and group projects, as well as old-fashioned quizzes.

Remember to bring the reading for the day into the discussion section.

Blogging

The professor invites you to contribute to his blog, “Life Examinations,” during the course. The course blog gives you an opportunity to reflect on the ideas you are learning and share them with the whole blogosphere. Your posts are public, and will remain so. This is in part to make the assignment more meaningful — it is not just a purposeless exercise — and to encourage you to do your best work. Your parents can read them! Your future employers can read them!

You can either write substantive posts and comments (about 300-500 words) or brief entries or comment on existing posts. You get **5 points for each substantive post** and **1 point for each brief entry**. To encourage you to participate throughout the term, we have divided the semester into three periods, the first ending October 10, the second November 10, and the third December 10. You can receive a maximum of 10 experience points for each period.

You will get the experience points for completing the assignments, as long as they are intelligible and readable. We encourage you to contribute without worrying too much about your writing abilities. However, you can also get skill points for your posts by selecting your most significant contributions to your portfolio. (See more on the portfolio below.)

Conventional academic papers

You may write, if you choose, one or two “conventional” academic essays in this course. They will be based on a prompt we give you and due at a specified time (see the “Assignment timeline” below). *Late work will not be accepted!* The papers will be quite short, 500-750 words. Here, too, making the effort counts: you will get **15 experience points for each, on the condition that the paper would receive a C**. Each paper can get up to **15 skill points** in addition, depending on its quality.

Experience Points:

3 points per section, depending on your participation as determined by your GSI

Max points:

75 points

Min points:

25 required to pass the course

Skill points:

None

Experience Points:

5 points for substantive posts, 1 for brief entries

Max points:

30 total, max 10 per third of the term

Skill points:

Up to 30, as part of your portfolio

Experience Points:

15 points each paper of acceptable quality submitted on time

Skill points:

Up to 15 per paper

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Group work

Many students hate group work. But for better or for worse, most work in the “real” world — your working life after your higher education — involves group work, and it’s a good idea to learn to deal with it. Your group projects can be **slideware presentations, academic posters, podcasts, videos, and websites**, or whatever you think of, as long as your GSI approves it. Groups can consist of 3–5 students. Creating the group is its members’ responsibility. In other words, if you want to create a group project, find your partners yourself.

You will get **20 experience points for participating in a group project that would receive at least a C and which is completed by December 1**. You can also get **up to 30 skill points** for a group project, depending on its quality. Individual students’ score for the group project will be a function of the quality of the final product and your group members’ assessment of your level of contribution.

Experience Points:

20 points

Skill points:

Up to 30

Self-evaluation and Portfolio

You have two opportunities to reflect on your own learning.

A **midterm self-evaluation** is due on October 20 (the day after the fall break). You will get **5 experience points** for it. In the self-evaluation, you write a brief essay (no more than 500 words) on what you’ve learned and what your strengths and weaknesses are. You will receive feedback from your GSI and a *diagnostic* grade. (This means the grade won’t count; it’s just a signal to you on how you are doing.)

Experience Points:

5 points

A **final portfolio** is due on December 20. It is a document in which you pull together some of the work you’ve done throughout the term — from the blog, from your group projects and papers, whatever you think showcases you the best — and write a framing essay for it. The whole portfolio will be evaluated for quality only; you’ll get no experience points for it, but it can earn you **30 skill points**.

Skill points:

Up to 30

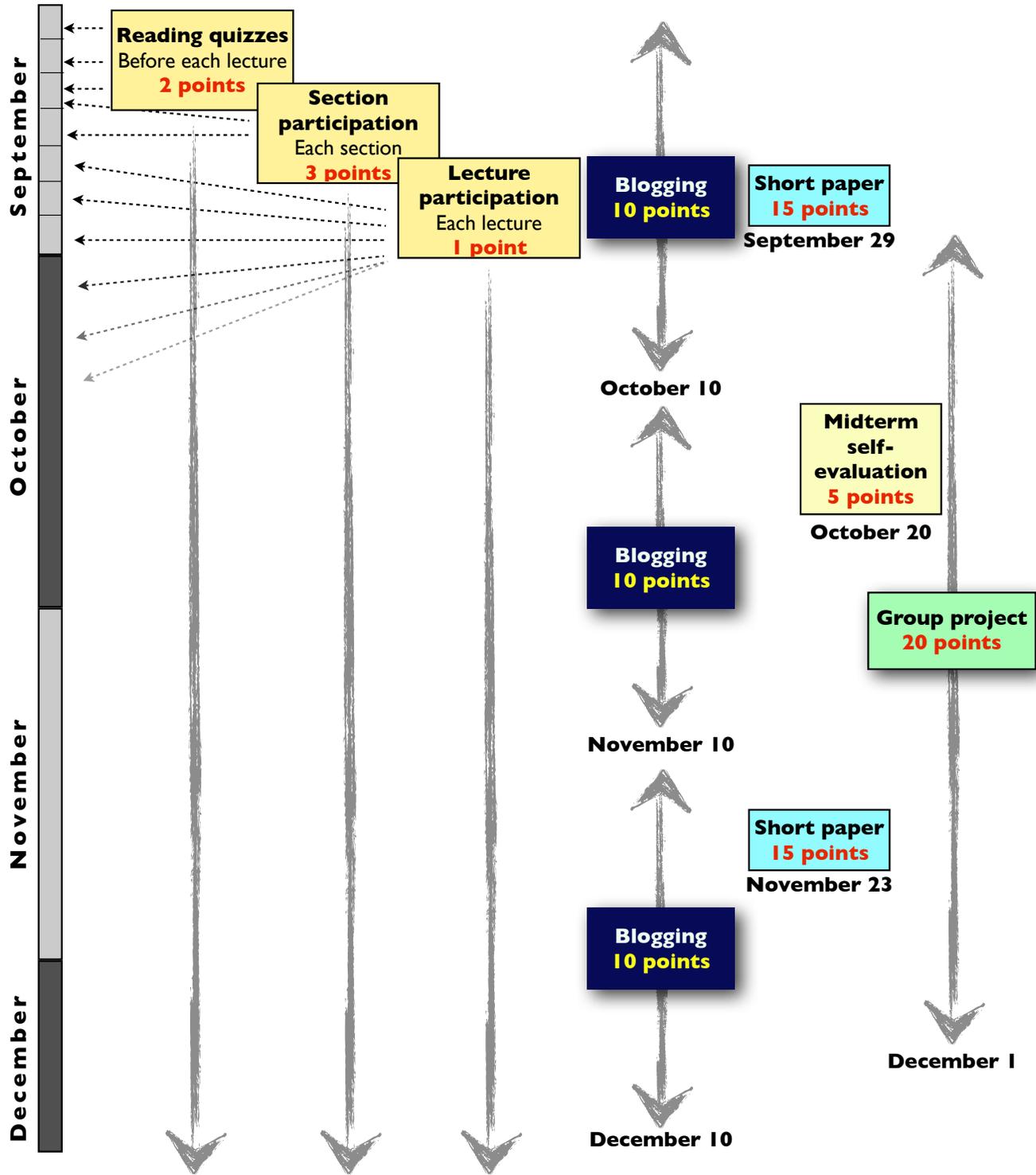
If this sounds confusing or daunting, don’t worry: we’ll give you much more details on it and the other assignments as the semester progresses.

Summary

Maximum experience points that will count toward your grade: **200**
Maximum possible skill points: **90**

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ASSIGNMENT TIMELINE & EXPERIENCE POINTS



TOTALS	50	75	20	30	30	5	20
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Grading

Skill points

Your conventional papers, group work, and the final portfolio will be evaluated with a letter grade and will accrue skill points according to the following scheme:

	Conventional papers	Group work and portfolio
A	15	30
A-	13	26
B+	10	20
B	7	14
B-	4	8
C+	2	4
C	0	0

Course grade

Your points will translate into a final course grade on the following scheme:

245	A
230	A-
215	B+
200	B
185	B-
170	C+
155	C
140	C-
125	D+
110	D

Please remember that you **must** have 25 points from section participation to pass this course! In other words, even if you have 185 points total but 20 section points, you will fail the course.

Students with Disabilities

If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please make an appointment to see Prof. LaVaque-Manty. If you haven't done so already, you are also encouraged to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), Rm. G-625 Haven Hall 1045, tel. 763-3000 (Voice/TTY/TDD).

Religious Observances

In keeping with the University of Michigan policy of respecting students' religious commitments, all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. Please note that, according to the Provost's policy on religious holidays, **you must give notice of a religious conflict by the drop/add deadline.** After that, requests cannot be honored.

Incompletes

The university policy on the grade of "incomplete" will apply in this course. It is generally not in a student's interest to have an incomplete, so try to avoid getting one.

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If you actually want to file a *grievance* of any grade you have received, you must follow this procedure:

Grade grievances

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before approaching the GSI.
2. Provide an explanation **in writing** for why the grade you received was unfair.
3. If you are unsatisfied with your GSI's response, you may write an appeal to the professor. This appeal must include your original explanation to the GSI and a written explanation for why it is unfair.

Departmental grade grievance procedures are outlined on the political science website, at <http://www.polisci.lsa.umich.edu/undergrad/grievance.html>.

Policy regarding e-mail

We encourage you to use e-mail to communicate with us. Keep in mind the following:

- We will reply to e-mails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours during the weekend.
- We will be happy to answer substantive questions about the course materials, but we will *not* read drafts of papers or partial papers submitted electronically.
- E-mail is a part of your performance in this course. It is also a means of *professional* communication. Dude, if u like cant tell the diff b/w dat n rting 2 ur friends, u r an idiot. ill fail u n ROTFLMAO.;P

Academic integrity

Engaging in academic work is a tricky business. On the one hand, it is important that individuals do the work that is assigned to them, even if it means reinventing the wheel. On the other hand, all scholars stand on the shoulders of others — in other words, all meaningful academic work is collaborative in one way or another — so it is sometimes hard to draw the line.

There is another reason why citations are so prevalent in academic writing. For all their bloviating, academics are a modest bunch, and when they “Joe Schmoe says this,” they think it’s possible they’ve gotten Joe’s idea all wrong. So they want to give their readers a chance to get it out for themselves.

Putting this simply, the idea of citations in academic work is to

- (1) **give credit where credit is due**, and
- (2) **allow the reader to check things out and pursue things further**.

That’s why us academics take the practices of proper citation extremely seriously. If you engage in any form of academic misconduct, you will **automatically fail this course**. And that is only the first part. As the LSA Academic Judiciary Manual of Procedures specifies, a student may be expelled from the university for academic misconduct. So that we’re clear on this, for the purposes of this class, plagiarism will mean

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submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

Additional information on what does and does not count as plagiarism is available on the course website. **You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with those cases.**

Meeting the learning objectives in this course requires that *you* apply your current knowledge and skills to the questions and exercises and, through them, improve that knowledge and those skills. Shortcuts won't get you there, however appealing they might seem. Because of this, **the use of commercial study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparknotes.com, and other similar resources outside this course counts as academic misconduct.** You will automatically fail this course if we catch you using such resources. They also won't do you any good in this course.

Calendar

- Sept. 8 Introduction: **What is political theory?**
- Sept. 13 Plato, "Apology," in *The Trial & Death of Socrates*.
Sept. 15 Plato, "Crito," in *The Trial & Death of Socrates*.
- Sept. 20 Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail."*
Sept. 22 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 1–7 (W, 9–21).
- Sept. 27 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 8–26 (W, 21–52).
Sept. 29 Michael Walzer, "Political Action."*
- Oct. 4 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* chs. 11–14 (W, 148–165).
Oct. 6 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 15–18 (W, 165–179).
- Oct. 11 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 21, 28–29 (188–193, 224–233).
Oct. 13 Thomas Halper & Douglas Muzzio, "Hobbes in the City: Urban Dystopias in American Movies."*
Rebecca Solnit, "The Uses of Disaster."*
- Oct. 18 Fall study break**
- Oct. 20 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chs. 1–9 (W, 286–321).
- Oct. 25 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 10–17 (W, 321–340).

Texts marked with an asterisk (*) are accessible in the "Readings" folder on the course website's Resources.

Texts marked with a **W** are in Wootton, ed., *Modern Political Thought*.

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- Oct. 27 Locke, *Second Treatise*, chs. 18–19 (W, 340–353).
Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet.”*
- Nov. 1 J-J Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (W, 376–410).
Nov. 3 Rousseau, *Social Contract*, bks. I and II (W, 427–449).
- Nov. 8 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (W, 502–521).
Nov. 10 Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” (W, 522–525).
Hannah More, “Village Politics.”*
- Nov. 15 Selections from *The Federalist* (W, 543–557).
Nov. 17 J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 2 (W, 599–620).
- Nov. 22 Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 3–4 (W, 620–639).
Nov. 24 No class because of Thanksgiving break
- Nov. 29 Mill, *Subjection of Women*, chs. 1–2 (W, 652–677).
Dec. 1 Mill, *Subjection of Women*, chs. 3–4 (W, 677–705).
LaVaque-Manty, “Being a Woman and Other Disabilities.”*
- Dec. 6 Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (W, 775–797).
Dec. 8 Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, parts I and II (W, 798–809).
- Dec. 13 Shlomo Avineri, “The Communist Manifesto at 150.”*
No discussion sections