



Course Description

This course explores the fundamental questions of politics from the perspective of Western political theory. This way, the course serves as a chronological introduction to the theoretical study of politics.

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 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.

Read this syllabus carefully!

You are responsible for knowing its contents.

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Introduction to Political Theory

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.

Assignment Structure

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 receive B at the end of the term.
- 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.** We encourage you to focus on just two optional components.
- **People who deserve the best grades are always the people who do the assignments out of interest in them, not because they want a good grade.** Your best bet chance for doing well in this course is developing interest in the ideas and assignments.
- **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.

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	Assignment	Due date (if applicable)
Common components	Readings Do the readings before lecture and respond to brief online quizzes.	Noon, each day of lecture
	Lectures Attend lecture physically or via live broadcast. Lectures are not required, but participation can count for your grade.	
	Discussion sections Discussions are where you get to sharpen your understanding of the texts and ideas, try out and practice your own ideas, and engage others. It is very important to attend and <i>participate</i> in discussion sections regularly. That means every time.	
	Self-evaluation Two self-evaluations, one at around midterm time and one at the end of the term, allow you to think about what and how you have learned. In the self-evaluations, you'll look at the grading criteria and give yourself a grade you think you deserve up. In the midterm self-evaluation you also make plans for the rest of the term.	February 23 April 26
Optional components	Conventional academic papers You may write one or two "conventional" academic essays in this course. They will be based on prompts we give you and will be due at a specified time. The papers will be quite short: the first 500, the second 1,000 words.	January 24 March 28
	Blogging The professor invites you to contribute to his blog, "Life Examinations," during the course. The 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.	
	Group project Students may form groups of 3-5 five and create a project that takes up some idea, issue, theme, problem or a set of theorists from the course and deals with it in a creative way. The projects may be websites, podcasts, videos, games or whatever one can think of, as long as all GSIs involved approve it.	March 7 (plan approved) April 8 (final project)
	Portfolio If you wish, you may submit a final portfolio of your work instead of the end-of-term self-evaluation. The electronic portfolio will pull together some of your work from the semester and offer your reflections on it and your learning.	April 26

More Info

Details on these various options is available on the course's CTools site:

Resources > Course Mechanics

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Grading

The grading in this course is as user-friendly as is possible. There are many ways of arriving at a grade. This means that the system may look a bit complicated at first; be sure to read it carefully and ask us as soon as you have questions about it.

GRADE RANGE	EXPECTATIONS
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do all the readings and complete 95% of the online reading quizzes. Attend and participate actively in 95% of discussion sections and perform satisfactorily in all section in-class assignments. Participate actively in lectures by asking or answering questions. Do A level work on one optional component and at least high-B level work on another. <p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You cannot make up gaps in the reading or participation components by doing more optional components.
B	<p>There are two basic ways of thinking about a B level grade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do all the readings and complete 95% of the online reading quizzes. Attend and participate actively in 95% of discussion sections and perform satisfactorily in all section and in-class assignments. Participate actively in lectures by asking or answering questions. Focus on two optional components and receive a B range grade in at least one of them. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fail to meet one dimension of the expectations for an A range grade.
C	<p>There are two basic ways of thinking about a C level grade:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do most of the readings and complete 70% of the online reading quizzes. Attend and participate actively in 70% of discussion sections and perform satisfactorily in more than half of section and in-class assignments. Focus on two optional components and receive a C range grade in at least one of them. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly fail to meet two dimensions of the expectations for an B range grade.

Grading Rubrics

What we expect for A level work in the optional assignments is explained in a separate handout available on the course's CTools site:

[Resources > Course Mechanics](#)

It should be obvious what it takes to get a grade below the C range, but we hope no one gets there.

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Grade grievances

If you believe you have been graded unfairly, follow these steps:

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>.

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.

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

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.

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General Policies

Email

Email is the best way for communicating with the instructors in this course. Here are some guidelines:

- **Email is a form of professional communication.** For that reason, it might be helpful to know that in a professional context, messages are written in standard written English, not in IMese, they are signed, and they don't begin "Hey professor" or "Hey Marie." (First-year students might also not yet know that to address a professor as "Mr." or "Ms." is equivalent to saying, "F--k you, loser. I know you have a Ph.D., but I don't respect it.")
- We will respond to your messages within 24 hours during the week and 48 during the weekend.
- We will be happy answer questions on email, but we will not read drafts of work submitted by email. To have us read drafts, you will need to bring to office hours.
- You are welcome to use your non-UM email addresses, but all announcements we send will go to your UM email.

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.

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).

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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Calendar

Jan. 5	Introduction: What is political theory?
Jan. 10	Plato, "Apology," in <i>The Trial & Death of Socrates</i> .
Jan. 12	Plato, "Crito," in <i>The Trial & Death of Socrates</i> .
Jan. 17	MLK Day — No class
Jan. 19	Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail."*
Jan. 24	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , chs. 1–14.
Jan. 26	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , chs. 15–26.
Jan. 31	Michael Walzer, "Political Action."*
Feb. 2	Friedrich Nietzsche, "First Essay" from <i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
Feb. 7	Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> chs. 11–14.
Feb. 9	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 15–18.
Feb. 14	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs. 21, 28–29.
Feb. 16	Rebecca Solnit, "The Uses of Disaster."* Ed Viesturs, excerpt from K2.*
Feb. 21	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> , chs. 1–9.
Feb. 23	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , chs. 10–16.
Feb. 28	"Spring" Break
March 2	"Spring" Break
March 7	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , chs. 17–19. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet."*
March 9	J-J Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , Preface and Part One.
March 15	<i>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</i> , Part Two.
March 17	Rousseau, <i>Social Contract</i> , bks. I and II.
March 21	Edmund Burke, selections from <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> .
March 22	Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" Hannah More, "Village Politics."*
March 28	J.S. Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , ch. 2–3.
March 30	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , ch. 4.
April 4	Mill, <i>Subjection of Women</i> , chs. 1–2.
April 6	Mill, <i>Subjection of Women</i> , chs. 3–4. LaVaque-Manty, "Being a Woman and Other Disabilities."*
April 11	Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, selections from <i>The German Ideology</i> .
April 13	Marx & Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> , parts I and II
April 18	TBA

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*.

You may use texts from other editions or read them online, but you will be responsible for the texts listed on the syllabus, not what you find and read elsewhere. If you have questions, please ask us.