# SOSC 11400 23 - Power, Identity, Resistance I - Instructor(s): James Vaughn

Project Title: **College Course Feedback - Autumn 2023**

Number Enrolled: **16**
Number of Responses: **9**

## Report Comments

Opinions expressed in these evaluations are those of students enrolled in the specific course and do not represent the University.

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## What are the most important things that you learned in this course? Please reflect on the knowledge and skills you gained.

| Comments |
| --- |
| How to think structurally |
| I learned a lot about political philosophy and classical liberalism. I also learned how to follow the logic of the arguments each philosopher was making. |
| Social theories and their philosophical basis. |
| I learned a lot about liberalism and political philosophy. |
| The philosophical beginnings of modernity, specifically liberalism |
| The creation and development of liberalism and social contract theory through reading Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and essays from Abbey Sieyes and Immanuel Kant. I developed my skills in reading dense philosophical texts and constructing arguments about them in academic papers. I have read plenty of philosophy in the past, but after this course I feel immensely more confident in my understanding of it. |
| The foundations of liberalism and how different thinkers attempted to reconcile autonomy with society. |
| I learned all about the foundational teachers of politics and liberalism. |
| The evolution of modern political thought and more specifically liberalism through the works of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and others through the 17th–18th centuries. Liberalism as grappling with the problem: we all must live in society to overcome nature, but society generates conflict, inequality, and oppression. How do you create a political system that maximizes freedom and equality while still being stable? We marched over sovereigns and sovereignty, absolute power, numerous states of nature and social contracts, and the general will. |

## Describe how aspects of this course (lectures, discussions, labs, assignments, etc.) contributed to your learning.

| Comments |
| --- |
| Discussions are super helpful |
| Discussions helped me understand the context of each philosopher and also to connect ideas together to understand their main arguments/ideas. |
| Professor Vaughn is the best lecturer I have ever encountered. It is fortunate to be taught by him – although I am taking this late in my fourth year. Discussions are also carried out logically, meaningfully, and interestingly. |
| The discussions were very engaging and helpful. |
| Guided discussions allowed me to really grasp the key takeaways from the text |
| Seminars were absolutely fantastic, Dr. Vaughn is a great speaker. He was able to break down very complicated concepts to help us understand them and kept the class engaged. I also greatly appreciated the historical context he gave us at the start of every text. Besides the seminars, we had three papers which all felt very fairly evaluated and had a variety of prompts to choose from so that we were able to write about something that actually interested us. Finally, we each had to give an in class presentation to introduce the text which I was dreading but it honestly was not that bad and I ended up enjoying it, although I do think that since everyone spoke over the five minute limit anyways it should be changed to ten because it's impossible to explain a long reading in such little time. |
| Lecture discussions were very valuable as they allowed me to understand some very confusing texts when I could not grasp them completely. |
| The choice of readings and class discussions contributed the most. |
| Discussions were alright – a lot of the time, they were centered around Professor Vaughn asking questions and heavily leading the conversation, which I'm fine with because he presents the important concepts accessibly and authoritatively, but it might not be everyone's cup of tea. |

## Please respond to the following:

| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| This course challenged me intellectually. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% |
| I understood the purpose of this course and what I was expected to gain from it. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% |
| I understood the standards for success on assignments. | 4.78 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 22.22% | 77.78% |
| Class time enhanced my ability to succeed in graded assignments. | 4.78 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 22.22% | 77.78% |
| I received feedback on my performance that helped me improve my subsequent work. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% |
| My work was evaluated fairly. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| I felt respected in this class. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Overall, this was an excellent course. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |

## Additional comments about the course:

| Comments |
|---|
| This is the essence of my UChicago journey. |
| Great class if you're interested in the political philosophers who shaped our modern world. Pairs well with American Civ. Professor Vaughn is great at making sure you understand and remember key points. |
| The most impactful course I've ever taken. It has made me a better reader and thinker, and I have been able to apply the knowledge I have learned to other areas of my life. |
| It's a great course for anyone new to political philosophy. Be prepared to read loads however and share your thoughts in class. |
| Good times and interesting content. |

## I would recommend this course to:

| | No | Yes |
|---|---|---|
| Highly-motivated and well-prepared students | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Anyone interested in the topic | 25.00% | 75.00% |

## Thinking about your time in the class, what aspect of the instructor's teaching contributed most to your learning?

| Comments |
| --- |
| He guided the discussions a lot and helped us really clarify the ideas and logic of each philosopher. He often reiterated things to solidify the ideas, which was helpful, particularly in later weeks. |
| I mean everything. The class itself is very self–contained. Lectures are bridged seamlessly with the readings and then to the papers. |
| He was amazing at structuring discussions and making it clear what was important in the readings. |
| Well–guided discussions. A bit more call–and–response than some discussion classes, but I prefer this style as I am able to retain the important information better. Class always ends with an exciting tie–in to the next class's assigned reading, which is very motivating. |
| His ability to facilitate class discussion by breaking down tough concepts while still keeping everyone engaged. He would frequently ask us questions, and if no one knew the answer he would fall back on a simpler question and so forth until someone spoke up. Then from there, he would bring us back to the reading. This method of teaching was extremely effective because he never outright gave us the answer or spoke at us, but allowed us to solidly build our own understanding by acting as a guide. |
| The strong discussion facilitation allowed me to be confident in my understanding of the readings and allowed me to write more confident essays. |
| Dr Vaughn does a great job of guiding the discussions to the place they need to be in order to discuss the texts at their highest level |
| Professor Vaughn is, above all else, really great at taking and placing the important concepts we need to know front and center, repeating them heavily (almost too much). He usually defines the answers very straightforwardly and guides us through the nuances. |

## What could the instructor modify to help you learn more?

| Comments |
| --- |
| I think we could have had a little more free discussion. Guided discussion really helped to understand the ideas, but I think it might have also been helpful to discuss our interpretations and points of confusion a bit more. |
| I mean, Professor Vaughn is a great teacher (speaking from my four–year experience in the college). Just keep him less busy and more healthy. |
| nothing, he was great! |
| If we recapped the previous class's content quicker, we might be able to leave more on time (class often ends 5+ min late) |
| The readings are definitely not for the faint of heart and deter a lot of people from taking this course for good reason. I would often have to spend 5+ hours on a single one just to understand it since they were so incredibly dense. However, there is not really an easy solution to this because the fact I have learned so much from this course has convinced me that in order to actually learn philosophy you have to read the entire text – excerpts are not enough. I think this course would definitely benefit from slower pacing which would enable many of the readings to be broken up, ultimately avoiding a lot of time limitations. For example, we would read ~50 pages but then in class only discuss 25 of them, so then Dr. Vaughn would tell us to re–read the 25 pages we didn't get to for the next class in addition to the next reading. Then in the next class we would only make up the 25 indebted pages and then maybe 10 of the new ones. This would go on until eventually there came a reading that would be more glossed over so that we could reset. This might sound like it disrupts the learning but it wasn't actually that bad except for the readings we had to gloss over because we were potentially losing valuable information, but even then it's because they were less important than the ones we spent a lot of time on. So in summary, it's complicated and the quarter system doesn't do this class any favors, but blaming the instructor for that would be unfair. |
| N/A |
| Nothing he is lovely– only note would be that he tends to run over class time a bit. |
| Sometimes I think we spend too much time on administrative stuff and retreading old ground. At the same time, when we do retread old ground it seems like half of us struggle to efficiently vocalize the ideas we had just discussed, so... |

## The Instructor . . .

| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organized the course clearly. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% | 0.00% |
| Presented lectures that enhanced your understanding. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Facilitated discussions that were engaging and useful. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% | 0.00% |
| Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the course. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Challenged you to learn. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Helped you gain significant learning from the course content. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Was available and helpful outside of class. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Motivated you to think independently. | 4.89 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 11.11% | 88.89% | 0.00% |
| Worked to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |
| Overall, this instructor made a significant contribution to your learning. | 5.00 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% | 0.00% |

## Please include the name of the TA/CA/Intern you are evaluating. What aspects of the TA's teaching contributed most to your learning? What could the TA modify to help you learn more? Please include any additional feedback for the TA/CA/Intern.

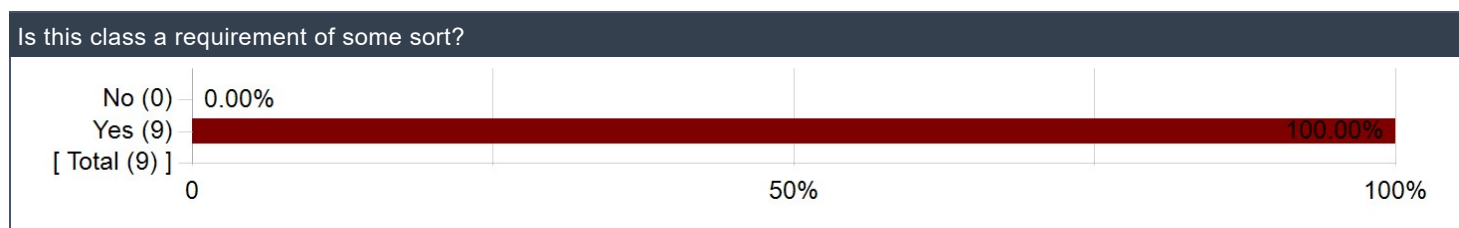| Comments |
|---|
| Graham is nice and knowledgeable |
| Graham Certain was our writing instructor. His seminars really helped me understand how to do argument reconstruction as I had never done it before. |
| Graham Certain |
| Will Graham. He led solid writing seminars. |
| Graham Certain |

## The TA/CA or Intern. . .

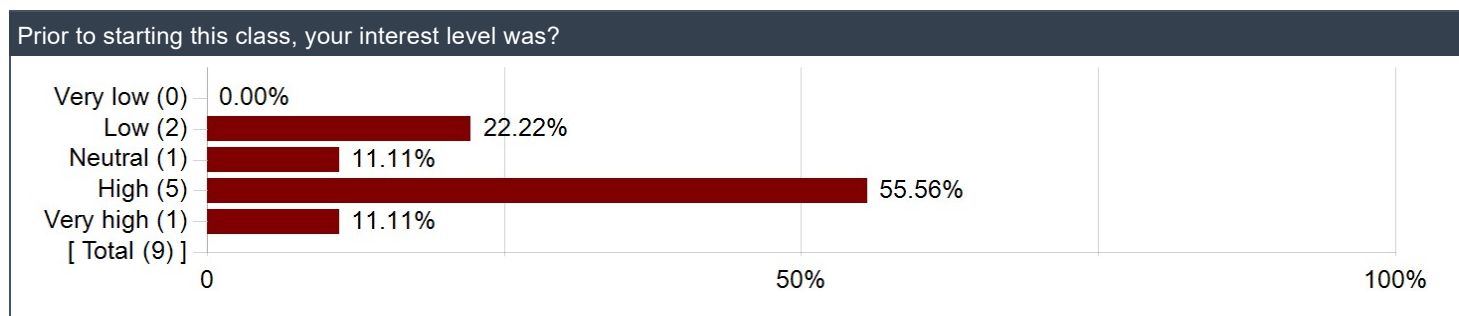| | Mean | Median | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facilitated discussions that supported your learning. | 3.75 | 4.50 | 20.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 40.00% | 20.00% |
| Gave you useful feedback on your work. | 4.25 | 4.50 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 20.00% | 40.00% | 20.00% |
| Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the class. | 3.25 | 3.50 | 20.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 20.00% | 20.00% | 20.00% |
| Challenged you to learn. | 3.40 | 4.00 | 20.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 40.00% | 20.00% | 0.00% |
| Helped you succeed in the class. | 4.00 | 5.00 | 20.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 60.00% | 0.00% |
| Was available and helpful outside of class. | 4.80 | 5.00 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 20.00% | 80.00% | 0.00% |
| Overall, this individual made a significant contribution to your learning. | 4.00 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 20.00% | 0.00% | 40.00% | 40.00% | 0.00% |

## How much did the following elements of the course contribute to your learning gains?

|  | Mean | Median | No Gain | A Little Gain | Moderate Gain | Good Gain | Great Gain | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laboratory Experience | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Field Trips | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Library Sessions | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Review Sessions | N/A | N/A | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 100.00% |
| Writing Seminars | 3.50 | 4.00 | 0.00% | 25.00% | 12.50% | 50.00% | 12.50% | 0.00% |

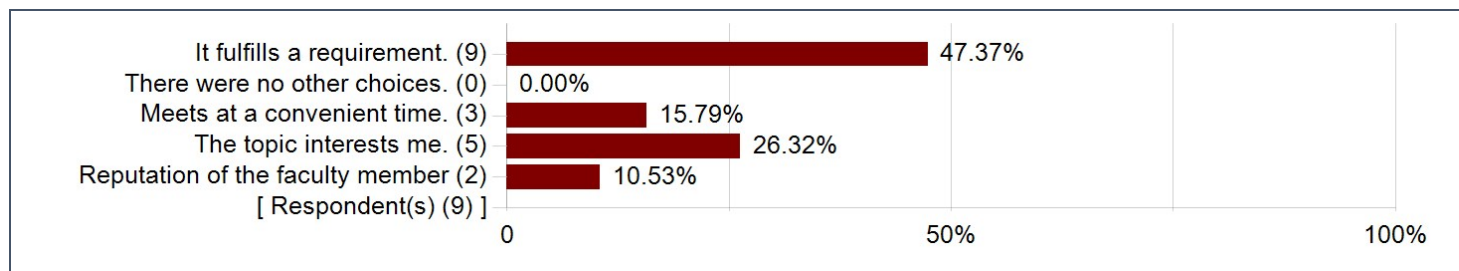## Is this class a requirement of some sort?

**Is this class a requirement of some sort?**

| | |
|---|---|
| No (0) | 0.00% |
| Yes (9) | 100.00% |
| [ Total (9) ] | |

## Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?

**Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Very low (0) | 0.00% |
| Low (2) | 22.22% |
| Neutral (1) | 11.11% |
| High (5) | 55.56% |
| Very high (1) | 11.11% |
| [ Total (9) ] | |

## Now that this class is over, your interest is?

**Now that this class is over, your interest is?**

| | |
|---|---|
| Diminished (0) | 0.00% |
| Satisfied (2) | 22.22% |
| Heightened (7) | 77.78% |
| [ Total (9) ] | |
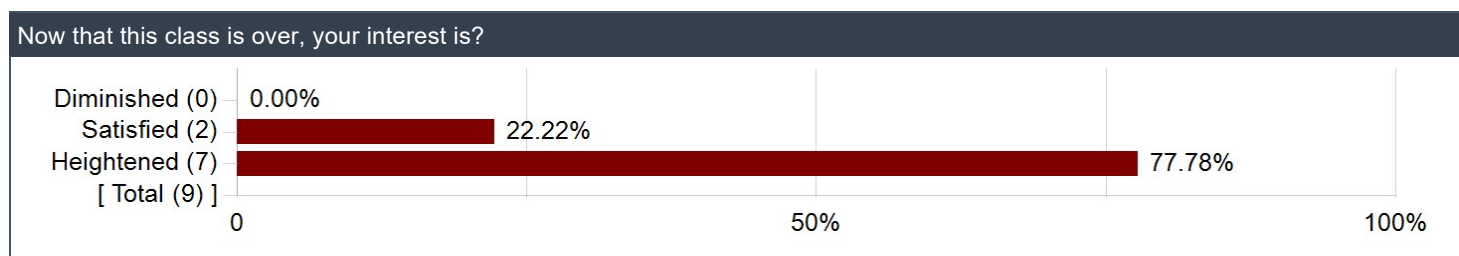
## Why did you choose to take this course? (Select all that apply)

| | |
|---|---|
| It fulfills a requirement. (9) | 47.37% |
| There were no other choices. (0) | 0.00% |
| Meets at a convenient time. (3) | 15.79% |
| The topic interests me. (5) | 26.32% |
| Reputation of the faculty member (2) | 10.53% |
| [ Respondent(s) (9) ] | |

## How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course?

| How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course? |
|---|

- <5 hours (1) — 11.11%
- 5-10 hours (7) — 77.78%
- 10-15 hours (1) — 11.11%
- 15-20 hours (0) — 0.00%
- 20-25 hours (0) — 0.00%
- 25-30 hours (0) — 0.00%
- >30 hours (0) — 0.00%
- [ Total (9) ]

## What proportion of classes did you attend?

| What proportion of classes did you attend? |
|---|

- None (0) — 0.00%
- 25% (0) — 0.00%
- 50% (0) — 0.00%
- 75% (1) — 11.11%
- All (8) — 88.89%
- [ Total (9) ]
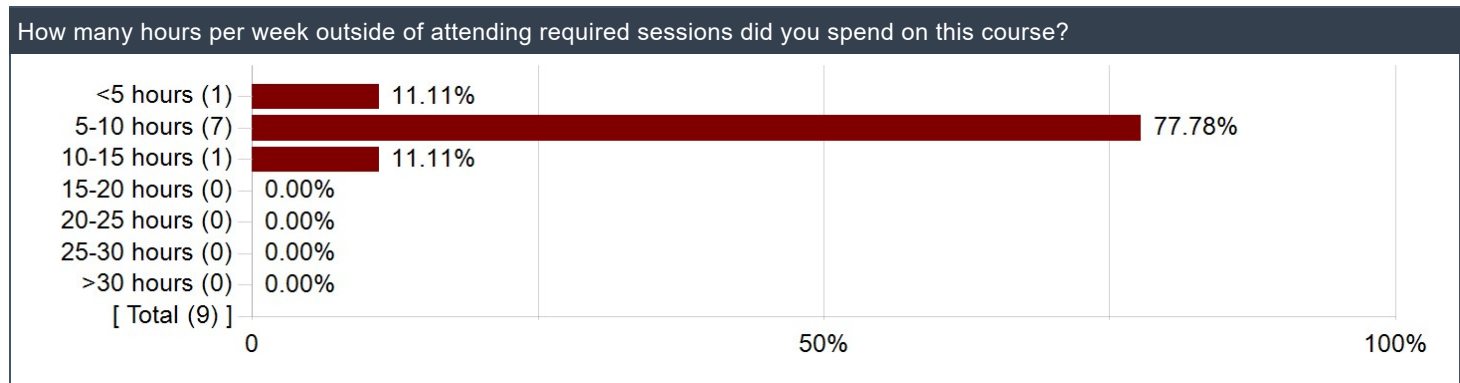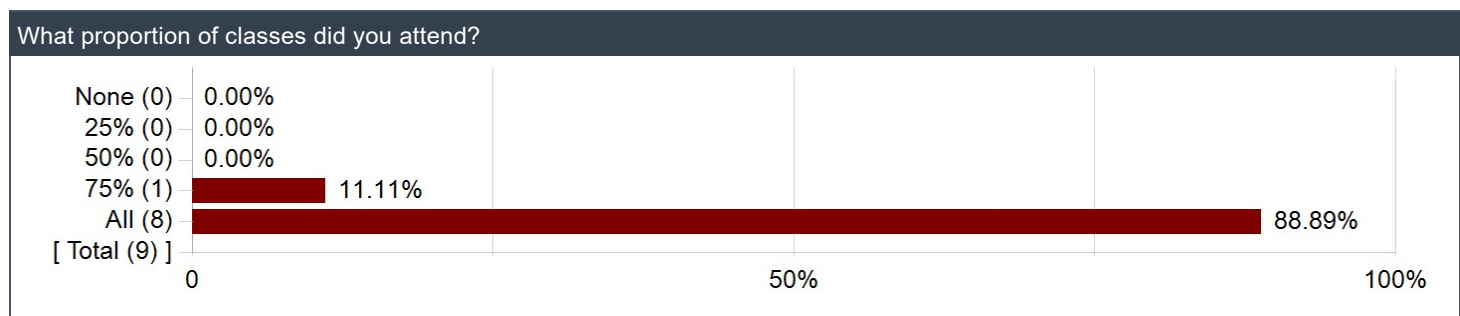
## Please comment on the level of difficulty of the course relative to your background and experience.

| Comments |
|---|
| I read parts of the three main texts in a high school class which definitely helped guide my understanding of them. But I think it would be fine if I didn't have any experience either. |
| I think Professor Vaughn boils everything down. So not too difficult. He helps us digest difficult texts effortlessly. |
| compared to other sections of power this was not too difficult |
| If you're an upperclassman, this is not a hard course |
| Very difficult but also very rewarding. I have read philosophy in the past and this course takes it to another level, both in its expectations but also in what it gives you in return. Be prepared to put in a lot of work or else you will be lost in class. However, its not exasperatingly difficult or crushes your spirits because everything feels very fair. |
| The course was a bit challenging writing wise but professor Vaughn gave very helpful feedback and was very open and willing to help. |
| It's manegable |
| For all that people like to be scared of power, it's really no different from any other core writing class. The readings aren't too long (usually 30–50 pages) though they can be dense for some authors (Hobbes). The essays are honestly easier than HUM essays, if slightly longer, because instead of having to come up with original thoughts you're just carefully retreading authors' arguments. If you can just do most of the readings and write down Professor Vaughn's main points, you'll be fine. |