

POLI 271: Modern Political Thought

UNC_CH
Department of Political Science
Course: POLI 271
Office Hours: by appointment

Professor: Matthew C. Weidenfeld
Office: Hamilton Hall 354
Email: mweiden@email.unc.edu
<https://calendly.com/mweiden/30min>

TA's: Sam Schmitt
Office: Hamilton 303
Office Hours: Thursday 1215-315PM
sschmit@live.unc.edu

Matthew Young
Office: Hamilton 303
Office Hours: MW 11-12 and F 10-11
mhyoung@live.unc.edu

Course Format: The first two-thirds of POL271 will consist of a mix of lectures and discussion of the assigned readings. Students should attend all lectures and participate in recitation sections. The final third of the course will be conducted as a simulation and, therefore, the content of each class will vary. Students should attend all classes (if need be, I will take attendance). This course will rely on student participation and preparation and, like all political theory courses, it is text intensive. This means that the reading load will be difficult and, given the nature of the course material, students must prepare for each class by completing the reading assignments for that day, as well as doing a good deal of meeting and research outside of class. This class fulfills the political theory requirement for political science majors.

Course Description: This course will provide an introduction to modern political theory. We will spend the majority of our time focusing on the classic texts of political theory, from Machiavelli to Rousseau, which should provide students with a solid foundation to continue studies in political theory, political science, and any number of courses in the social sciences or humanities, for that matter.

The final third of the course will not proceed in the normal lecture/discussion method of learning; instead, it will rely on actually recreating and engaging with the ideas and arguments of these times. This method of learning is known as reacting to the past. "Reacting to the Past" (RTTP) consists of elaborate games, set in the past, in which students are assigned roles informed by classic texts in the history of ideas. Class sessions are run entirely by students; instructors advise and guide students and grade their oral and written work. It seeks to draw students into the past, promote engagement with big ideas, and improve intellectual and academic skills. The course will be extremely hard work, but should also be intellectually engaging and, to put it simply, a good deal of fun.

Course Goals: Martin Heidegger, one of the twentieth-century's most influential philosophers, asserted

[Human Being] has grown up into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its Being are disclosed and regulated. *Its own past...is not something which follows along after [Human Being], but something which already goes ahead of it.*

Heidegger, whose language poses difficulties for trained political theorists – as students in an introductory course, there is no need to worry – makes a simple and compelling point; our tradition of thinking about politics controls and determines, in many ways, our own self-understanding of what it means to be a member of a community, a citizen and, most important, a person. The problem we face is that this tradition largely goes unnoticed and ends up determining our self-understanding in ways we are unaware of. The task of this course is to critically engage the modern tradition of political theory in a way that allows individual students to take up an autonomous and conscious relationship to that tradition; that is, the aim of this course is to allow each student, on her or his own terms, to choose how she or he might wish to appropriate that tradition.

The canon of political theory can and does inform our average, everyday reflections concerning what it means to live-well with others. With that in mind, we will use these historical and theoretical texts to raise issues that are both contemporary and practical; namely, we will use these texts to raise questions concerning how one should go about living-well with others in the present age. To borrow from Socrates, this course will continually return to the two fundamental questions of politics: how should we live and what should we do?

Course Readings:

- 1) Morgan, Michael. [2011] *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*. Hackett: Indianapolis. Fifth Addition.
- 2) Bill Offut, *Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City, 1775-76*.
- 3) 3) Barnet Schechter, *The Battle for New York* (New York: Walker & Company, 2002), 11-45.*
- 4) Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 11-92.*

All texts marked with an asterisk (*) will be made available on Sakai.

Course Outline:

I: Introduction to the Course. What is Political Theory and For What Might it Be Useful?

A: *Course Introduction* January 8

Read: Kierkegaard, Søren. *My Aim as an Author* from Concluding Unscientific Postscript and Gadamer, Truth and Method (sections).*

II: Modern Political Theory: The Ascent of the Individual and the Decline of the Political.

A: *Niccolo Machiavelli: Politics Without Ethics?*

Read: *The Prince* January 13
pp. 506-526 and 534-544

Read: *The Prince* January 15
pp. 549-553

Assignment: Essay One Distributed

B: An Introduction to Reacting to the Past

NO CLASS: MLK JR DAY January 20

Practice Game

January 22

Assignment: Essay One Due

Group Presentation Groups One and Two (Recitation Sections)

C: *Thomas Hobbes: The Politics of Fear and Security.*

Read: *Leviathan* January 27
pp. 578-580 and 618-633

Read: *Leviathan* January 29
pp. 633-639

Read: *Leviathan* February 3
pp. 648-658, 686-698

D: *John Locke: The Birth of Liberalism.*

Read: *Second Treatise* February 5
pp. 711-725

Assignment: Essay Two Distributed

Read: *Second Treatise* February 10
pp. 732-746

Read: <i>Second Treatise</i> pp. 767-776 Assignment: Essay Two Due	February 12
D: <i>Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The State of Nature Reconsidered.</i>	
Read: <i>Discourse</i> in Morgan pp. 828-851	February 17
Read: <i>Discourse</i> pp. 851-866, notes 9 (869-872) and 15 (879)	February 19
E: <i>Can the Social Contract Be Just? Rousseau Continued</i>	
Read: <i>The Social Contract</i> pp. 882-891 Assignment: Groups 3 and 4 Present (In Recitation Sections)	February 24
Read: <i>The Social Contract</i> pp. 891-904	February 26
Catch-Up Day/Review	March 2
MID TERM	March 4
SPRING BREAK	March 9-11
III: Reacting to the American Revolution: The Intersection of Political Ideas and Practice	
Preparing to Play	
Read: <i>Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution,, pp. 1-90</i> Distribute Roles:	March 16
The Rules of the Game and the Factions Involved	March 18
Read: <i>Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution, 63-90</i> Schecter, <i>The Battle for New York*</i>	
New York City and the World in 1775	March 23
Read: Wood, <i>Radicalism*</i> <i>Patriots, Loyalists and Revolution, 131-160</i>	
C: Begin Game	March 25
<i>Game Session One</i>	
Watch: Speeches (Order: Livingston, Delancey, McDougall, Philipse, Sears, Jauncery, Brasher)	

Read: Texts as necessary to write your papers and defend your positions.

Tasks: See *Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City*, pp. 80-81

Game Session Two

March 30

Watch: Speeches

Read: Texts as necessary to write your papers and defend your positions.

Carry-Over Day

April 1

Game Session Three

April 6

Read: Papers of opposing Players, primary materials as your papers and responses require

Game Session Four

April 8

Read: Papers of opposing Players, primary materials as your papers and responses require

Game Session Five

April 13

Read: Papers of opposing Players, primary materials as your papers and responses require

Game Session Six

April 15

Read: Papers of opposing Players, primary materials as your papers and responses require

Carry Over Day

April 20

Post Mortem/Exam Review

April 22

Final Exam

**April 27
8 AM**

Course Requirements:

There are six types of assignment in this course: An in-class presentation (in discussion section), 2 short essays (each 2 pages in length), 2 exams, 1 simulation papers, a video presentation, and participation and attendance.

The in-class (recitation section) presentations will be worth 5 points. The short essays are each worth 10 points. Each student will be required to write a total of 2 short essays, leaving a maximum of 20 essay points for the course. The exams are each worth 20 points, totaling 40 maximum exam points. Students will write a research paper during the simulation worth 20 points. Students will also produce a video version of their speech during the simulation, which is worth 5 points. Participation in class and recitations is worth 10 points. The assignments are worth a total of 100 points.

Students will be graded on the basis of the total points accumulated over the presentations, essays, exams and participation out of a maximum of one-hundred (100) points. All grades are live options in this course.

Grade Scale:

A 100-93.3	B+ 89.9-86.7	C+ 79.9-76.7	D+69.9-66.7	F 59.9-0
A- 93.2-90	B 86.6-83.3	C 76.6-73.3	D 66.6-63.3	
	B- 83.2-80	C- 73.2-70	D- 66.2-60	

No incompletes will be given. Cases of academic dishonesty will be treated as severely as possible. This means that any case of plagiarism or cheating will be referred to academic council and I will petition for a grade of “honor code F.”

All essays *must* be submitted to me in class, at the end of the session (as I determine it), on the day they are due. You may not submit short essays to me electronically without my *prior* permission. *Also, I quite simply will not accept late work.* Any late essays not cleared by me in advance or covered by a University excused absence will receive a score of zero. You may be asked to produce written confirmation of your late work excuse.

Finally, there will not be any opportunity to make-up or reschedule missed exams. If you miss your appointment for an exam and have not discussed this with me in advance and/or you do not have a University excused absence, you will receive a score of zero. *These policies are non-negotiable.*

Description of Assignments:

In-class presentations. During your first recitation section meeting, each student will sign up into a group of 5 to give a presentation and lead a discussion related to the topics of a given week in your recitation section. Your TA will inform you of due dates and distribute a rubric for this

presentation. For instance, those who sign up for Group 1 and Group 2 will be asked to give a presentation playing the role of Machiavelli, Foreign Policy Advisor, on how to approach Iran.

Each group will be asked to prepare a 10-15 minute presentation on the topic. The presentation will most likely ask your group to take a position on a controversial subject. Your presentation should be aimed at persuading the class that your position is the correct one to take. It should focus on the readings and class discussions of that week. Beyond that, the content of the presentation and the discussion will, largely, be up to you. I do, though, ask each group (*with the entire group present*) to meet me with their TA a week before their presentation to discuss what you have in mind. Creativity is encouraged.

Short Essays. Beginning on Beginning of January 15, I will distribute an essay assignment during select classes that, for the most part, *must* be completed in one week. For instance, the essay distributed on January 15 must be completed for class on January 22. All essays will be graded on a ten point scale.

Your essay *must* be written in a 12 point font (preferably Times), 1.5 spaced with 1 inch margins and left justified. The essay may not exceed two pages in length and I would recommend that it not fall short of two, full pages. I also ask students to give their name *only* on the back of the essay. This allows us to grade the essay “blindly.” *Essays that do not follow these formatting guidelines will be returned with a score of zero.*

The essays will ask you to engage in a careful reading and interpretation of difficult passages in the texts we have read. These assignments will, generally, present you with a quote or passage that may or may not have been discussed in class and ask you to explain the author’s meaning. The assignment may, also, ask you to take a position on a difficult issue that has been raised in class and to defend that position. The essays will be graded on the basis of how accurately you interpret the text and how well you prepare a concise, intelligent and well written response to the assigned question, *using evidence from the readings* to support your interpretation.

The essays are designed to help you with two crucial liberal arts skills: reading and writing. The short essay format is, first, designed to help you write in an extremely clear and concise manner with a focus on the texts being read. As far as I am concerned, clarity and exactness of expression are crucial to all writing in the liberal arts. These assignments also aim at developing your skills in textual interpretation. In the liberal arts, in most cases, the text is the only thing that interlocutors hold in common through which they can develop shared (or competing) understandings. With that said, the essays also hope to help you develop your skills in arguing and thinking through the texts that we will read together. All of this is aimed at developing one crucial point: I think of the essays as quite critical to the course and developing life-long reading and writing skills. I take the essays very seriously and I expect you to do the same.

The essays are also designed to provide you with immediate and intense feedback on your writing and a sense of my expectations concerning what constitutes well written work in a political science course and my grading style.

Simulation Essays: During the simulation you will write a research paper that will come to a total of 4 written pages of work (1.5 spaced). These essays are to be posted to our course website by 10 AM the day before our class meeting at which it will be presented. So, if you are presenting for our first game session on April 1, then your paper must be posted to our sakai website by 10 AM on March 31. The content of these papers will also be discussed in your “role sheets,” and will also be determined working together and in consultation with your TA’s.

There are minimum requirements for each possible grade in these simulation essays. Taking these steps is the condition for the possibility of each grade, it does not guarantee receiving these grades. The research papers will also be evaluated holistically.

For a **D** you need to show at best passing familiarity with the game book and the historical issues presented.

For a **C**, you will need to write a paper based only on the game book and what is written in your role sheet.

For a **B**, you will write a paper that includes all of the above and also relies on 1 or 2 texts in the gamebook for evidence to support your position.

For an **A**, you will write a paper that includes all of the above and **also** draws on two texts we’ve read earlier in the term to develop your analysis and support your position.

If your essay is not posted at the agreed upon due date and by 10 AM, you will receive a **ZERO**. I will rely on these electronic submissions to respond to your written work as quickly as possible. Again, you will be required to submit all of your papers electronically to our course website for your peers to read and react to. Because we are engaged in a simulation, *I quite simply will not accept late work*. If your paper is late, then history will have passed you by. More important than this, a late essay may undermine the work of your entire group. Any late essays not cleared by me in advance or covered by a University excused absence will receive a score of zero. You may be asked to produce written confirmation of your late work excuse.

Simulation Speech (Video) These papers will serve as the basis of speeches that you will give to the New York Assembly. These speeches will be presented electronically (you will make a video) and should be no more than 3 minutes in length. These videos will be posted to our private SLACK channel by 10 AM on the same day your paper is due. You should work with the other people who share your role and your faction to produce this video. When we enter our class sessions, videos selected by the TA’s will be playing on the classroom screens.

This course will require everyone to speak in class (a lot) and you should be well-read and prepared for all necessary speeches and, more important, impromptu interventions you may want to make.

Participation and Attendance: Given the importance of attendance to this course, I reserve the right to take attendance at any point in the semester and use this information to help determine your attendance/participation grade. This course requires your attendance and active

participation, and I will carefully monitor this. You should plan on attending all of our class sessions and all recitation sections. If you have more than two unexcused absences from class and/or recitation, I will subtract 5 participation and attendance points for each additional class missed (i.e. the third class missed will lead to a maximum participation and attendance total of 5 points and so on). Quite simply, this is a class you must attend and participate in if you are to do well. This grade also includes both the quality and quantity of your active participation. If your role asks you to carefully read and respond in-class to another student's paper, then I will closely monitor if you have done this and grade your participation accordingly.

Mid-term and Final Exam: The exams are written exams based on all material covered to that point in the semester. The exam *may* include: multiple choice questions, passage identification sections (from either texts or *other students simulation papers*), essay questions, or fill in the blank.

Class Discussions:

As far as I am concerned, critical thinking about politics relies on interested peers discussing topics of importance to them. It is my hope that we will constantly engage in discussions and debates that are both timeless and timely. As we all know, important issues of politics allow for deep disagreement between reasonable people. With that in mind, I ask all students to adhere to basic rules of civility and, more important, to exercise tolerance during our discussions.

Description of Class: The final portion of this class will be taught through a guided simulation. As we approach these texts and begin the simulations we will move into a number of heated discussions and debates. As far as I am concerned, the practice of political theory relies on interested peers discussing topics of importance to them. As we all know, important issues of political theory and practice allow for deep disagreement between reasonable people. With that in mind, I ask all students to adhere to basic rules of civility and, more important, to exercise tolerance during our discussions. As the rules of the games stipulate, when you are discussing game matters both in and outside of class, you must address your peers according to their game names. That is, instead of saying, "Bob, that is the worst argument I've ever heard in my life!" (a rather insulting thing to say), during gameplay, both in and out of class, you are required to rephrase this point as, "Mr. Livingston, you not only insult our intelligence, but the sacred name of John Locke.." (This is a much worse insult, as you'll see).

A Note on Cell Phones: I ask you to leave your phone "off" (not on vibrate!) during class. A Cellphone going off during a meeting of the Provincial Assembly may draw the ire of the mob (not to mention the Professor). I will merely subtract five points from your final grade for every instance in which I see a student texting (or speaking) on their cellphones during class time. I will NOT notify a student that I have subtracted these points. If you are concerned that you may have been penalized for your use of a cellphone during class, speak to me after our class meeting.

A Note on Laptops: Laptops are forbidden from this course, unless you have received prior approval from the professor. If you are granted approval and you use your computer for non-

class related purposes – i.e. facebook, instagram, or watching a Philadelphia eagles game – you will lose 5 points (out of 100) for the term.