

PLPT 1010: Introduction to Political Theory

Seminar time: Monday 9-10am, Wednesday 9-10am
Seminar venue: Nau 101

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Office hours: Mon, Wed 10-11am, or by appt.

How should societies be governed, given conflicting interests and values?
Should women or minorities receive special consideration in political institutions?
Do you agree that the '1%' should share their wealth with the '99%'?
To what extent are the globally affluent responsible for assisting the global poor?

These questions took on new significance following the 2008 economic recession, which galvanized diverse political debate and protest and raised important questions about the status quo. This course seeks to address these questions through examining some of the major debates in society about multiculturalism, tolerance, immigration, equality and our corresponding political rights and responsibilities. Our discussions will draw on modern and historical accounts exploring these themes, using these seminal theories to critically reflect on contemporary political institutions, cultures and dialogue.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will learn to distinguish between theoretically informed and theoretically impoverished political discourse. You will explore the ways in which certain themes of political discourse in the United States and globally are used to bolster or negate particular political cultures and policies.

More specifically, this course encourages you to:

1. *identify* key political theories in contemporary political rhetoric, policy, and action
2. *examine* the philosophical foundations of these theories, and *assess* their relative strengths and weaknesses
3. *analyze* and *critique* manifestations of these themes in political discourse, asking to what extent these form cohesive or desirable political platforms
4. *critically reflect* on the impact this discourse has on your life and society
5. *respectfully engage* with others within and outside the course on questions of political and social importance, both during semester and in the future

Who should take this course?

Political Theory encourages students to challenge the status quo. It asks people to stop and reflect on their institutions, their political culture, their hopes for the future, and to critically assess alternative possibilities. Political theory also requires students to:

- read carefully and critically
- accurately summarize and analyze key arguments
- learn the difference between refutable claims and evidence-based arguments
- think critically, and apply this knowledge to real world scenarios

- engage in robust, respectful and reflective debate both within and outside the class

These are all invaluable skills that you are likely to develop throughout your college career, and will continue to develop throughout your life.

Because of the general applicability of political theory knowledge and skills, this is a course that is relevant to anyone with an interest in the social sciences and humanities, the ideas outlined above, or simply an active engagement with the political and social world. It is not necessary for you to have studied political theory before, or to have familiarity with theoretical literature or methods – I have designed the course to allow you to develop the key skills and access the important ideas needed to succeed in this course.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

1. Political Theory Portfolio (40%)

You will create an online portfolio of your work on the course Wordpress site, demonstrating your engagement with the major themes and readings of this course.

This involves:

a. Reading matrices (10%)

For each reading you will complete a short matrix (I will hand this out in class) in which you explain the main thesis, identify the key evidence or logic that was used, and devise at least two questions for class discussion. The point of this assignment is to encourage you to practice *efficient*, *effective*, and *critical* reading. These responses should not be time-intensive—in fact, they are designed to improve the speed and quality of your academic reading—and they will be posted to your individual Wordpress site before each lecture, which should allow for productive lecture discussion. Over the course of the semester I will randomly choose 10 reading matrices to assess. They will be graded as either ‘satisfactory’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ (i.e. pass/fail).

b. Blogging political theory (20%)

Over the course of the semester, I would like you to think about how the material we are discussing in class connects with contemporary political and social themes. You will produce **four** one-page blog entries (submission dates to be decided in discussion sections) in which you identify material from outside the course that engages with the ideas we are studying. In your blogpost you will attach or link to the document or media (where possible), or include a brief (less than a paragraph) explanation of the book, building, or material you want to assess. Explain your choice of item and why it is relevant and thought-provoking for this course. I encourage you to think creatively about the kinds of material you might like to study, including (but not limited to): print news media, TV news media, a novel, a movie, a TV show/episode, the physical environment (for example, an analysis of building layout, e.g. curb-cutting), reflecting on a conversation with a peer or family member. The only restriction is that you should not use the same kind of item more than once. Each week two students will present their blog entry to their discussion section as a prelude to class discussion. The blog will allow you to identify and evaluate how political theory informs your everyday experience and serves as encouragement to engage in academic conversations outside the classroom.

c. Op-ed article (5%)

Contemporary politics is often underpinned by philosophical principles, whether implicit or explicit. One way in which scholars and public figures publically engage with these principles is

through op-ed articles in newspapers. You will write **one** op-ed article (500-600 words) on a subject of your choosing, identifying a public policy or addressing a theme in political discourse that relates to one of the topics we have studied in this course. Public understanding of the coherence (or incoherence!) of political principles is important for reflective, critical engagement with political policies and actions. Writing an op-ed piece allows you to think about how contemporary politics are influenced by the theories we study in this course and to practice persuasive, clear, and concise writing.

d. Reflective essay (5%)

This essay should be between 500-600 words. Explain how your thinking about the role of political theory in contemporary politics has changed (or not changed) over the semester. The point of this essay is to allow you to critically reflect on your learning experience in this course.

2. Essay (30%)

You will write a 1200 word essay on **one** of the eight topics listed on the class website.

This involves:

a. Essay draft (5%)

This draft should be around 1200 words (it may be slightly more or less). It is an opportunity to get external feedback on your essay before you submit your final copy. Please note, the better your first draft, the more helpful feedback you are likely to get from your peers!

b. Feedback on two essays (5%)

You will read and comment on two other students' essay drafts using the rubric available on the class website. This allows you to offer your peers helpful feedback on their essay, to reflect on your own essay, and to learn in more detail about two other class topics.

c. Final essay + self-assessment (20%)

Your final essay should be **no more than** 1200 words (not counting footnotes or bibliography). This is an opportunity for you to clearly communicate your critical engagement with a key question of contemporary political theory. In addition to the essay, please include a one page (single-spaced) response to the feedback you received from your peers and a personal assessment of your essay.

3. Exam (20%)

At the end of the semester you will sit a two hour exam, involving both short answer and essay questions. More details about the exam can be found on the class website. The purpose of the exam is to encourage you draw connections between the major theories and theorists we have studied.

4. Class Participation (10%)

In the first class I will give you the rubric by which we will be assessing your participation over the semester. The main objective in assessing your participation is to incentivize you to engage with your classmates, your TA and with me over the course material, to consider different perspectives on key political theories, and to develop your verbal communication skills through practicing how to analyze, critique, and respond to critique respectfully in discussion.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

Read carefully and completely

Engaging thoughtfully with the course materials is essential for your success, and I have designed assignments to help you learn how to become a more efficient and effective reader. If you are uncertain about your understanding of any particular text or material, please ask me, your TA, or your peers for clarification as soon as possible. It is also important that you read assignments and the course schedule carefully—don't undermine your good understanding of the material by not following the particular instructions for an assignment or by not submitting an assignment on time.

Participate in class discussion actively and constructively

Engaging in political discourse (whether in the public or private sphere) is important for good citizenship. As a consequence, modeling engaged, reflective debate is one of the key objectives of this course. Participating in class requires you to not only attend all classes, but to actively contribute to discussion. Considering diverse perspectives is also essential to good conversation and decision-making, and as such it is also important that you encourage your classmates to make contributions and to listen thoughtfully and respectfully to what they say.

Think ahead

Please tell me in advance if there are impediments to your learning and participation so that we can work together preemptively to address potential problems. I aim to respond to emails promptly (within two business days of receipt), turn back assignments in a timely fashion (within a week of the due date), and treat students fairly by applying standardized grading templates (which you will be given in advance of assignments). I also relish the opportunity to talk with you about the course and your work in office hours or by appointment, and welcome any feedback you might have on the course or my teaching. However, please don't email me or your TA at midnight before an assignment is due to ask for help. Think ahead about your schedule and come see your TA or me in advance so that we can discuss strategies for successfully completing the different activities.

COURSE MATERIALS

All course readings, supplementary material, and resources will be available on Collab.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	Reading	Class Activities	Before Next Class	Due Dates*
Week 1: What is political theory?				
Lecture 1		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to Political Theory• Class Survey	Reading Matrix 1	
Lecture 2	(1) Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading Matrix 1		
Discussion Section	Relevant news article (read in section)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductions• 'What is political theory?' 5 minute paper• Discuss article: think-pair-share	Reading Matrix 2	

I. Representation				
Week 2: Early ideals of representation				
Lecture 3	(2) Plato (excerpts)		Reading Matrix 3	
Lecture 4	(3) Plato (excerpts)		Reading Matrix 4	
Discussion Section				
Week 3: Modified ideals of representation				
Lecture 5	(4) Rousseau (excerpts)		Reading Matrix 5	
Lecture 6	(5) Rousseau (excerpts)		Reading Matrix 6	
Discussion Section				Group A blog entry 1
Week 4: Contemporary ideals of representation				
Lecture 7	(6) Zakaras, 'Lot and Democratic Representation'		Reading Matrix 7	
Lecture 8	(7) Goodin, 'Enfranchising All Affected Interests'		Reading Matrix 8	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Group B blog entry 1
Week 5: Global representation				
Lecture 9	(8) Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose'		Reading Matrix 9	
Lecture 10	(9) Benhabib, 'Another Cosmopolitanism'	• Democracy v. liberalism exercise	Reading Matrix 10	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Group A blog entry 2
Week 6: Cosmopolitan debates				
Lecture 11	(10) Nussbaum, 'Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism'	• Formative course and teaching evaluation	Reading Matrix 11	
Lecture 12	(11) Ackerly, <i>Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference</i>		Reading Matrix 12	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Group B blog entry 2
II. Recognition				
Week 7: Representation of who?				
Lecture 13	(12) Phillips, 'Dealing with Difference'	• Fluid debate – room corners	Reading Matrix 13	
Lecture 14	(13) Mansbridge, 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women?'		Reading Matrix 14	
Discussion		• Peer assess		Group A blog

Section		reading matrices 13 & 14		entry 3
Week 8: Toleration				
Lecture 15	(14) Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration'		Reading Matrix 15	
Lecture 16	(15) Brown, <i>Regulating Aversion</i>	• Video of Brown at ICI, Berlin	Reading Matrix 16	
Discussion Section	Op-ed article examples	• Op-ed discussion on tolerance		Group B blog entry 3
Week 9: Spring Break – No Class				
Week 10: Multicultural representation and recognition				
Lecture 17	(16) Kymlicka, <i>Multicultural Citizenship</i>		Reading Matrix 17	
Lecture 18	(17) Parekh, <i>Rethinking Multiculturalism</i>		Reading Matrix 18	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Group A blog entry 4
III. Rights and Responsibilities				
Week 11: Religious rights				
Lecture 19	(18) Young, 'A Multicultural Continuum'		Reading Matrix 19	
Lecture 20	(19) Newspaper article: French burka ban		Reading Matrix 20	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Group B blog entry 4
Week 12: Territorial rights				
Lecture 21	(20) Dummett, 'Immigration'		Reading Matrix 21	
Lecture 22	(21) Calhoun, 'Is it Time to be Postnational?'		Reading Matrix 22	
Discussion Section		• Relevant news article/blog entry		Op-ed Article
Week 13: Cosmopolitan rights and responsibilities				
Lecture 23	(22) Singer, 'One Community'	•	Reading Matrix 23	
Lecture 24	(23) Pogge, <i>Politics as Usual</i>	•	Reading Matrix 24	
Discussion Section		• Essay feedback instructions	Essay feedback	Essay Draft (Friday, 5pm)
Week 14: Cosmopolitan rights and responsibilities				
Lecture 25	(24) Narveson, 'We Don't Owe Them a Thing'		Reading Matrix 25	

Lecture 26	(25) Miller, <i>Globalizing Justice</i> + Two student essays		Reading Matrix 26	
Discussion Section		· Sign up for feedback meeting with TA	Revise essay	Essay Feedback (due in sections)
Week 15: TBC				
Lecture 27	(26) TBC		Reading Matrix 27	
Lecture 28	(27) TBC			
Discussion Section		· Return 'What is political theory?' reflection from Week 1		Final Essay (Friday, 5pm)
Week 16: Conclusion				
Lecture 29	Review	· Charting themes		
Lecture 30	Review	· Revision questions		
Discussion Section		· Concept map – class themes, essays, blog entries		Political Theory Portfolio (Friday, 5pm)

*All reading matrices are due before the lecture at 9am. All blog entries are due by 9am the day of your discussion section – this gives your fellow students and TA a chance to read them before class and to incorporate these ideas into class discussion.