

## **POLS 3000H: Introduction to Political Theory (Honors)**

University of Georgia, Department of Political Science

Spring 2024

M W F 12:40-1:30pm

Baldwin 104

Instructor: Harrison Frye

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Office Hours: M W 2:00-3:00pm, and by appointment

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This course introduces students to the discipline of political theory by discussing challenging arguments regarding how society is organized. To that end, we will focus on four topics:

*Speech:* Should there be limits on freedom of speech?

*Justice:* How should a just society distribute economic resources and opportunities?

*Authority:* What is a “state” and why is it necessary?

*Democracy:* Is democracy a good way of making political decisions?

Obviously, this course will not cover all or even most of the academic discipline of political theory. Nonetheless, these are central topics of concern today, and offer a valuable point of entry to political theory. Importantly, while you will become familiar with a variety of arguments, the course is not so much about texts but rather about prompting careful reflection about politics. The hope is that you will subject your assumptions and beliefs to critical scrutiny. Students are therefore expected to explore and develop their own considered responses to the ideas in the readings.

The syllabus describes (1) course objectives, (2) course materials, (3) grades and assignments, (4) rules and requirements (including important dates), (5) a course schedule, and (6) a set of discussion questions for the group assignment.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

## 1. Course Objectives

- Sharpen analytical thinking and debating skills.
- Understand the moral foundations of the modern state.
- Practice engaging with viewpoints different than one's own.
- Confront difficult moral questions about the way we organize our social life.
- Come to understand one's personal values better.

## 2. Course Materials

The following book will be available for purchase from the UGA bookstore.

J. P. Messina, *Private Censorship*, OUP, ISBN:9780197581902

All other readings will be available on eLC.

## 3. Assignments and Grading

The following components will make up your grade in this course:

1. Participation: 10%
2. 5 Reading Responses: 10% (equally weighted)
3. Group Project: Discussion: 20%
4. 2 Papers: 60% (equally weighted)

### *Participation:*

Because this is a smaller class, participation is absolutely essential. It is important that you come to class having done the reading, with the readings, and be willing to participate. Repeated unexcused absences are grounds for failure in this course, so please communicate with me if you foresee being absent or something comes up.

### *Reading Responses:*

On five (5) days of your choosing, I would like you to submit a ~200 word reading response to the reading by **9 am** on the relevant day on eLC. These papers are a way for you to engage the work on your own terms, as well as a way for me to come to class getting a preview of what you find interesting. Some suggestions: (i) Formulate a question regarding the reading and why it is important, (ii) Point out a flaw in the argument, (iii) Discuss how the arguments in the text may be relevant for a contemporary political issue, etc. These papers will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

*Group Project: Discussion*

Five times throughout the semester we will have discussions about a question posed related to the course material (questions listed on the course schedule).

These discussions will be led by a group of ~4 students. In the first few weeks of the course, your job is to form such a group. Once you have identified your group, please select one person to e-mail me ([hpfrye@uga.edu](mailto:hpfrye@uga.edu)) your group roster to me with all members cc'd by January 17<sup>th</sup> at 5pm. Discussion questions will be picked then in class on January 19<sup>th</sup>.

As you will see, the discussion questions touch on a controversial topic. The group leading the discussion will begin class with a 10-to-15-minute presentation outlining a clear answer to the question posed. This means taking a stance on a controversial subject as a group. This presentation should draw on the course material as well as any additional resources the group sees as necessary to answering the question. I expect every group member to speak during this presentation.

I will then collect questions for the group from other students in the class. I will give the group 10 minutes to deliberate over possible answers to the questions. I will then pose questions to group from the pooled questions, giving every member an opportunity to answer these questions. In what time remains, I will ask the class whether or not they were convinced or what issues remain.

Your grade will be determined primarily by the following consideration:

- Clarity of presentation.
- Fluency with the relevant course material.
- Cogency of argument.
- Dealing with questions.

In addition to my own observations, I will use self-reporting to judge individual contribution.

*Papers*

There will be two papers (1300-1500 words) due throughout semester. Details are available on the Assignments portion of the eLC page.

*Revision Policy*

You can always re-write a paper in response to my comments for a different grade. You must get revisions back to me within two (2) weeks of receiving comments.

## 4. Rules and Requirements

### *Academic Freedom and Respect:*

We will be talking about controversial issues in this course. I expect students to disagree with each other, as well as with me. To that end, it is important to have an open, civil environment to explore and express a variety of positions. This requires each of us to engage respectfully with one another, especially when we disagree.

### *Electronic Devices:*

There is good evidence that electronic devices significantly distract from learning. Because of this, and the discussion-oriented nature of this course, I do not allow the use of laptops in this course (barring exceptional circumstances).

### *Academic Integrity:*

UGA Student Honor Code: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at [www.uga.edu/ovpi](http://www.uga.edu/ovpi).

Unless explicitly stated, artificial intelligence-based technologies, such as ChatGPT, must not be used to generate responses for student assignments.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated on any assignment. You are responsible for knowing and following the honor code and all rules of academic integrity.

### *Late Work:*

Papers submitted past the deadline will incur a penalty of a third of a letter grade for each 24-hour period the paper is late. If you need an extension for any foreseeable reason, let me know at least 48 hours before the due date of the assignment.

Emergencies do happen. I will accommodate any that should come up. NB: Computer problems do not count as an emergency. Back up early and often. I recommend using a cloud service such as Dropbox or Google Drive.

### *Important Dates:*

Spring Semester Begins – Jan. 8

Add/Drop – Jan. 8-12

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Jan. 15

Paper 1 Due – February 28

Spring Break – March 4-8

Withdrawal Date – March 21

Paper 2 Due – April 26

Classes End – April 29

## 5. Course Schedule

All readings marked with a \* are available on eLC.

Date	Class Material Covered
Mon., Jan. 8	No Readings (Introductory class)
Wed., Jan. 10	*Colin Bird, <i>Introduction to Political Philosophy</i> [1 <sup>st</sup> selections]
Fri., Jan. 12	*Michael Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational about Politics”
Mon., Jan. 15	No Class – MLK, Jr. Day
Wed., Jan. 17	*J. S. Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , Chapter 2
Fri., Jan. 19	Mill, Continued.
Mon., Jan. 22	No Class (there is a lot of reading for Wed., so get started on that!)
Wed., Jan. 24	J.P. Messina, <i>Private Censorship</i> , Chapter 1 (skip 1.5), Chapter 2 (skip 2.4)
Fri., Jan. 26	Messina, <i>Private Censorship</i> , Chapter 4 (skip 4.5)
Mon., Jan. 29	Messina, <i>Private Censorship</i> , Chapter 5 (skip 5.4)
Wed., Jan. 31	Guest Speaker: J. P. Messina (via Zoom)
Fri., Feb. 2	Discussion #1
Mon., Feb. 5	*G. A. Cohen, <i>Why Not Socialism?</i> , pp. 1-52
Wed., Feb. 7	*G. A. Cohen, <i>Why Not Socialism?</i> , pp. 53-82
Fri., Feb. 9	*F. A. Hayek, “Equality, Value, and Merit”
Mon., Feb. 12	Hayek continued.
Wed., Feb. 14	*Robert Nozick, <i>Anarchy, State, and Utopia</i> [selections]
Fri., Feb. 16	Nozick, cont.
Mon., Feb. 19	Discussion #2
Wed., Feb. 21	*John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> [1 <sup>st</sup> selections]
Fri., Feb. 23	*John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> [2 <sup>nd</sup> selections]
Mon., Feb. 26	Rawls., Cont.
Wed., Feb. 28	Paper 1 Due at 5:00pm – No Class
Fri., Mar. 1	*Elizabeth Anderson, <i>The Imperative of Integration</i> [selections]
Mon., Mar. 4	No Class – Spring Break
Wed., Mar. 6	No Class – Spring Break
Fri., Mar. 8	No Class – Spring Break
Mon., Mar. 11	*Tommie Shelby, “Integration, Inequality, and Imperatives of Justice”
Wed., Mar. 13	Discussion #3
Fri., Mar. 15	*Joseph Heath, “Why Are Racial Problems in the United States So Intractable?”
Mon., Mar. 18	*Liam Kofi Bright, “White Psychodrama”
Wed., Mar. 20	*Leslie Green, “The Self-Image of the State”
Fri., Mar. 22	*Michael Huemer, “The TV Contract”

Mon., Mar. 25	Huemer, cont.
Wed., Mar. 27	*Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Chapters 13-15 [1 <sup>st</sup> selections]
Fri., Mar. 29	*Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Chapters 17-19 [2 <sup>nd</sup> selections]
Mon., Apr. 1	*Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , Chapter 20-21 [3 <sup>rd</sup> selection]
Wed., Apr. 3	Discussion #4
Fri., Apr. 5	*Colin Bird, <i>Introduction to Political Philosophy</i> [2 <sup>nd</sup> selections]
Mon., Apr. 8	Bird, cont.
Wed., Apr. 10	*Joseph Schumpeter, <i>Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy</i> [1 <sup>st</sup> selections]
Fri., Apr. 12	*Joseph Schumpeter, <i>Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy</i> [2 <sup>nd</sup> selections]
Mon., Apr. 15	Discussion #5
Wed., Apr. 17	*Bruce Ackerman and Joseph Fishkin, “Deliberation Day”
Fri., Apr. 19	No Class
Mon., Apr. 22	*Lynn Sanders, “Against Deliberation”
Wed., Apr. 24	*Alex Guerrero, “The Lottocracy”
Fri., Apr. 26	Paper 2 Due at 5:00pm – No Class
Mon., Apr. 29	No Reading (A Review and Conclusion)

## 6. Discussion Questions

Discussion #1: Recently, university presidents at Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, and MIT faced widespread negative press for their performance in a congressional hearing on campus antisemitism. Many thought the presidents’ evasiveness to questions surrounding whether calling for genocide constituting harassment was unacceptable. The aftermath led at least one president, Liz Magill of UPenn, to resign. Assuming away legal issues, should universities adopt formal restrictions on hate speech among students?

Discussion #2: In 1965, the average CEO made 20 times the average worker. In 2022, the average CEO makes 344 times the average worker.<sup>1</sup> Should we be concerned about this increasing inequality in wages as a matter of justice?

Discussion #3: A recent analysis based on the 2020 census suggests that, while it has declined over the last few decades, black-white residential segregation still remains quite high relative to other racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>2</sup> Should the U.S. implement specific policies to promote further residential integration?

Discussion #4: Hobbes argues that the power of the sovereign cannot be divided or limited. Sometimes people raise the U.S. as a counterexample to this claim. However,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/ceo-pay-in-2022/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.census.gov/ces/wp/2022/CES-WP-22-14.pdf>

during the COVID-19 pandemic, civil liberties were widely suspended without much in terms of procedural safeguards. Does this suggest that the U.S. is, in fact, an absolute sovereign?

Discussion #5: Many in the U.S. find themselves dissatisfied with the two-party system. One proposal to reform elections in a way that purportedly gives people more choice involves Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV). RCV is an electoral system where voters rank candidates in order of preference instead of choosing just one. If no candidate wins a majority of first-choice votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and votes are reallocated to remaining candidates based on voters' next preferences. This process continues until a candidate achieves a majority. Would RCV be a good idea?