Political Science 150: Introduction to Political Thought

Section 01
Spring 2021
Maybank Hall 307

T/TH 1:40-2:55 pm

Instructor: Dr. Briana L. McGinnis
Email: mcginnisbl@cofc.edu
Office Hours: Zoom Office Hours Mondays from 2pm-4pm, additional hours available by appointment
Office Location: JC Long, 9 Liberty Street, Room 225

Prerequisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course will introduce you to political theory, or the normative branch of the study of politics. “Normative” refers to matters rooted in judgments about what ought to be – by contrast, empirical political science examines how things are. While political theory engages with empirical scholarship, its primary focus will always be prescriptive, rather than descriptive. Political theory evaluates political practices, institutions, and principles. In this class, we will explore the ideas underlying politics, both historically and in the present.

Objectives:
This course offers you an opportunity to familiarize yourself with important texts and foundational concepts in political theory. In addition to becoming conversant with “the canon,” loosely (but thoughtfully) interpreted, you will be expected to engage political concepts critically, with an eye to both what they meant in their own historical contexts and to what insights they can continue to offer us today.

Questions to consider include:
• Why do we engage in politics? Why should you participate politically?
• What does it mean to treat people equally?
• What should constitute “the political,” and what relationship should that have to everyday life?
• What is a good citizen? Does being a good citizen conflict with being a good person?
• What is the just relationship between the individual and society?

Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- **Demonstrate knowledge** of key thinkers and concepts over time (quizzes, exams and papers)
- **Compare thinkers** on similar concepts (papers and exam essays)
- **Use concepts** to analyze new situations (papers, exam essays)
- **Interpret texts** by identifying and explaining arguments in their contexts (papers and exams)
- **Evaluate interpretations** of concepts (papers and exam essays)
- **Explain** the nature and value of normative thinking (papers and exam essays)

**REQUIREMENTS:**

**Participation and engagement**

We will cover a lot of ground in this course, and the semester will pass quickly. As such, it is important to consider how you will meet the participation and engagement requirements of this class. Different people prefer to participate in different ways, and it is each student’s responsibility to ensure that they are fully engaged with the class.

**Engaging on OAKS:** Your active OAKS presence is strongly encouraged, even if you regularly participate in class discussions. Your thoughtful and civil engagement will be essential to enhance your own and your peers’ learning throughout the semester. Everyone should show curiosity and respect for each other and for different commitments and experiences. This is an intro-level course, so you will almost certainly encounter new and unfamiliar ideas. Students should feel free to revise their positions in light of new information; as such, please consider each other’s statements from a position of patience and interpretive charity. At the same time, kindly bear in mind that each of your classmates comes to the course with their own set of experiences. Please be sensitive to the possible effects of your statements on your classmates.

You cannot participate actively in this class if you are not present (either in-person or on Zoom). I strongly discourage missing class – we move quickly and while it is easy to fall behind, it is difficult to catch up again. You should aim to miss no more than three class meetings – If you incur any additional absences, please make arrangements with me to ensure you will be prepared to meet the class requirements.

Designated meetings will be used for discussion of that day’s readings and themes. Everything in the class – including the content of class discussions – may appear on exams. A significant portion of your grade is determined by participation, so I strongly encourage you to always come prepared with a passage from that week’s readings that you would like to discuss, in case you are called on in class. I will periodically ask students to suggest a passage, read it aloud to the class, and explain (briefly) why they believe it to be significant.
**Class meetings:** We will meet as scheduled twice weekly. The class is scheduled to meet as a hybrid in-person/Zoom course, but will move entirely to Zoom if required by the state, the College, or changing circumstances.

To meet social distancing requirements, the class will be split into two sections. Students are expected to be present in the classroom on their designated day and to participate via Zoom on the other meeting day. Please contact me for alternative accommodations if needed.

The meeting periods for this class will be heavily focused upon discussion, so it is important that you complete the readings prior to class meetings. Participation in both full-class discussions and breakout groups constitute essential components of this class.

**Face coverings:** Please review the College’s policies on COVID-19 safety here: [https://cofc.edu/back-on-the-bricks/academics-and-classrooms/classroom-policies/index.php](https://cofc.edu/back-on-the-bricks/academics-and-classrooms/classroom-policies/index.php)

*Face coverings are required in the classroom at all times. If at any time any student does not comply with face-covering requirements, class will be canceled for that day.*

**Syllabus**
This syllabus is a guide and it contains vital information about the class. Please read it carefully. This syllabus is subject to change.

**Communication**
The best way to reach me is via email (mcginnisbl@cofc.edu). Class communications will be conducted via your College of Charleston email, so please be certain to check it regularly. I will read and respond to email within 24 hours, Monday-Friday, during regular business hours (9am-6pm). Response times will be longer on weekends and during breaks. Please first consult the syllabus to see if your question is answered here.

**Etiquette**
Please be respectful. We will discuss contentious issues in this class and there will be times when you may be upset, but you are expected to listen and respond thoughtfully to your colleagues – even when you vehemently disagree with them on matters of great importance to you.

Please address every person in this class as they specify – that means by the name, pronoun, etc. that they indicate (both verbally and in written communication). The convention at the College of Charleston is to address faculty as “Dr.” You should address me as Dr. McGinnis or Professor McGinnis.

Try to learn the names of your classmates. If you cannot recall someone’s name, you should refer to them as “my esteemed colleague.”

**GRADING AND EVALUATION**
Grading scale
A (93-100)
A- (90-92)
B+ (87-89)
B (84-86)
B- (80-83)
C+ (77-79)
C (74-76)
C- (70-73)
D+ (67-69)
D (64-66)
D- (60-63)
F (0-59)

ASSIGNMENTS
There are 1000 points to be earned in this course. The distribution of the points is listed below.

Midterm take-home exam 200 (20%)
Reading quizzes (OAKS) 200 (20%)
Final take-home exam 300 (30%)
Story analysis paper 100 (100%)
Participation 200 (20%)

Extra Credit
Extra credit is available. You may attend any Political Science Department event at the College of Charleston (talk, etc.) and write a 300-500 word response to it. Each response is worth 10 points. You may turn in a maximum of five extra credit assignments over the course of the semester. Please turn them in to the Extra Credit Dropbox folder on OAKS. Talks in other departments (sociology, anthropology, history, African American Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, etc.) may also qualify. Please request authorization for talks outside of the Political Science Department. Please see the “Extra Credit” posting on OAKS for further information and for online alternatives.

REQUIRED TEXTS
This course uses one required text:

All other readings will be posted in PDF form on OAKS or available free of charge online.

COURSE SCHEDULE
I. What is Justice? What is Injustice?

**Week 1**
01/12 Introduction to Class

01/14 Defining Justice I: *Republic* Book I
   *Please bring the reading to class!

**Week 2**
01/18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no classes)

*01/19 Last day of drop/add

01/21 Defining Justice II: Justice as a set of practices, a structure, or a set of relations

   Reading: Aristotle, *Politics*
   **Book I**, section I and II (On political community) **BASPT 177-179**; Sections 6 & 7 **BASPT 181-183** (On inequality)

   **Book III** Sections 1-6 **BASPT 204-208**; Section 13 (on equality) **BASPT 213-215**; Book 7, Section 13 **BASPT 241-242**

   *Nicomachean Ethics*: **Book V** BASPT 150-160 (skim 153-155, and resume reading the last two paragraphs of p.155 (1133b 30)

**Week 3**
01/26 Injustice


II. Why Care About Justice? The Irrelevance of the Ethical to Politics

01/28 Political Concerns and the Will of the Strongest
   Reading: Thucydides, “Melian Dialogue.” BASPT 7-11

**Week 4**
02/02 Politics and Power
   Reading: Carl Schmitt, from *The Concept of the Political* (OAKS)

02/04 Realpolitik
   Reading: Machiavelli, from *The Prince*, BASPT 343-362; 362-375
   **In-class activity, Interpreting the text**: Cesare Borgia and Ramirro d’Orco
Week 5

III. Keeping Promises, Keeping Order: The Social Contract
02/09 Keeping Order, Keeping Compacts: Thomas Hobbes
   Reading: Hobbes, *Leviathan* BASPT, 419-438; 475-490

02/11 The Social Contract and the good Lockean Citizen
   Locke, from *The Second Treatise*. BASPT, 496-
   510, 517-530; 551-561

   Optional, recommended 530-542, 548-55

Week 6

IV. Good Citizens, Good Societies: The Social Contract Revisited
02/16 Living together virtuously
   Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* BASPT 611-615, 664-718

02/18 Norms and habits vs. laws and agreements I
   Reading: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* BASPT 586-602; Optional additional
   readings on OAKS

Week 7

V. Justice as Paying Debts and Giving Each What They are Owed
02/23 Desert and reciprocity
   Reading: Reading: David Schmidtz, *Elements of Justice*, 31-46; 49-53; 66-70; 82-103
   *(This looks like a lot of reading, but the pages are short)*

02/25 The Limits of Obligation
   Reading: George Kateb, “The Liberal Contract: Individualism, War, and the Constitution”
   (OAKS)

*** MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED ***

Week 8

03/02 No class. Review and study day.

03/04 No class. Review and study day.

Week 9

VI. Justice as the Good of the Many vs. the Good of the Individual
03/08: Individualism
   Henry David Thoreau, from *Civil Disobedience*, BAPST 974-980
03/09 Association and the Excesses of Individualism
Reading: Alexis de Tocqueville, 966-974

Week 10
03/16 Utilitarianism: Bentham and Mill
Reading: BAPST 876-881, 895-900; 916-27; 931-941,

03/18 Discussion day: The Trolley Problem
- ***Review Instructions for Short Story Critical Reflection, Available on OAKS***

Week 11
VII. Justice as Equality; Equality and Difference
03/23 The Foundations of Women’s Equality I
Reading: Olympe de Gouges, from Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, BAPST 781-785; O


03/25 Foundations of Women’s Equality II
Reading: Harriet (Hardy) Taylor Mill, BASPT 955-962

Week 12
03/30 Intersectionality in the 19th Century
Reading: Sojourner Truth, BAPST 963-965; Selections by Anna Julia Cooper (OAKS)

04/01 Oppression today: Structural Oppression
Reading: Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” (OAKS)

Week 13
04/06 Oppression and Racial Equality: Epistemic Equality, Identity, and Tone Policing I
Reading: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” by Frederick Douglass (OAKS)

04/08 Oppression and Racial Equality: Epistemic Equality, Identity, and Tone Policing II
Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (OAKS)

Week 14
04/13 Oppression and Racial Equality: The Experience of Oppression and Its Invisibility
Reading: Selections by W.E.B. DuBois (OAKS)
04/15 Oppression and Racial Equality: The Legacy of Slavery in the U.S.
Reading: Angela Y. Davis, “From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System” (OAKS).

Week 15
04/20 Concluding discussion and final exam review

POLICIES

Time Commitment: We will move quickly in this class, and the reading load is substantial. You should expect to invest approximately 3-4 hours per week of active work in the course. I recommend you log into OAKS at least 2-3 days per week to stay current. Additionally, you should check your College of Charleston email regularly.

I am aware of and sympathetic to the many challenges that college student experience, especially now in the time of COVID-19. If you are experiencing personal or health-related challenges, please communicate with me (sooner is better than later!). There are numerous resources that I can recommend to you and, to the best of my ability, I will work with you to help you complete the course successfully.

Depending on circumstances, sometimes withdrawing from the class is the best option. Please consult the Registrar’s website for withdrawal deadlines. Regardless of your circumstances, please reach out to me or somebody else for support before and/or after deciding to withdraw from the class.

Academic integrity

Note that written assignments in this course will be screened by plagiarism-detecting software. Please review the College of Charleston’s academic honor code, available here: http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php

It is not permissible to turn in work for this class that was produced for another class without prior approval.

Technology usage

- Devices must be set to “silent” during class. For those participating via Zoom, please mute notifications from other applications.
- Computers and tablets may be used, but this policy will change if they prove to be distracting.
- I encourage you to take notes by hand for this course – we will be interacting closely with the readings and you should be making notations on the text as you read and discuss.
- While participating via Zoom, please mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
**ACCOMMODATIONS**

**Religious Holidays**
Every effort will be made to avoid conflicts between assignments and religious holidays. If, however, you encounter such a conflict, please notify me as soon as possible (and certainly within the first two weeks of class to allow time for accommodations to be made). Please review the College of Charleston’s statement here: http://academicaffairs.cofc.edu/documents/procedures-and-practices/statement-of-accommodation.pdf

**Resources and accommodations**

**Religious Holidays:** Every effort will be made to avoid conflicts between assignments and religious holidays. If, however, you encounter such a conflict, please notify me as soon as possible (and certainly within the first two weeks of class to allow time for accommodations to be made). Please review the College of Charleston’s statement here: http://academicaffairs.cofc.edu/documents/procedures-and-practices/statement-of-accommodation.pdf

**Disability accommodations:** The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should apply at the Center for Disability Services/SNAP, located on the first floor of the Lightsey Center, Suite 104. You can contact Center at SNAP@cofc.edu or (843) 953-1431.

Students approved for accommodations are responsibility for notifying me as soon as possible and for contacting me one week before accommodation is needed. Please see me during office hours to discuss accommodations.

**Center for Student Learning:** I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning’s (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. The CSL is located on the first floor of Addlestone Library and they can assist you with writing term papers, essays, letters, memos or book reviews from developing ideas and organizing materials to editing final drafts (in addition to other services). Students can visit the CSL website to sign up for help by following the website’s directions and go into a drop-in session with Writing Lab Consultants. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at http://csl.cofc.edu.

**Food & Housing Resources:** Many students report experiencing food and housing insecurity. If you are facing challenges in securing food (such as not being able to afford groceries or get sufficient food to eat every day) and housing (such as lacking a safe and stable place to live), please contact the Dean of Students for support: (http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/about/salt.php).
Also, you can go to http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/student-food-housing-insecurity/index.php to learn about food and housing assistance that is available to you. In addition, there are several resources on and off campus to help. You can visit the Cougar Pantry in the Stern Center (2nd floor), a student-run food pantry that provides dry-goods and hygiene products at no charge to any student in need. Please do not hesitate to speak with me if you are experiencing issues that affect your ability to fully participate.

**Inclusion:** College of Charleston offers many resources for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff along with their allies. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and pronouns of your choice. Please advise me of any request early in the semester via your college-issued email account or during office hours so that I may make the appropriate notation on my class list.

**Mental & Physical Wellbeing:** At the college, we take every students’ mental and physical wellbeing seriously. If you find yourself experiencing physical illnesses, please reach out to student health services (843.953.5520). And if you find yourself experiencing any mental health challenges (for example, anxiety, depression, stressful life events, sleep deprivation, and/or loneliness/homesickness) please consider contacting either the Counseling Center (professional counselors at http://counseling.cofc.edu or 843.953.5640 3rd floor, Robert Scott Small Building) or the Students 4 Support (certified volunteers through texting "4support" to 839863, visit http://counseling.cofc.edu/cct/index.php, or meet with them in person 3rd Floor Stern Center). These services are there for you to help you cope with difficulties you may be experiencing and to maintain optimal physical and mental health.

**Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Disruption Policy**
For your reference, the College’s disruption policy is below. This class is being offered fully online for the sake of safety and continuity. As such, it will proceed as scheduled unless the instructor notifies you otherwise.

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools. Additional Student Support Services: http://capp.cofc.edu/Support%20Services/index.php

Additional Policies: http://policy.cofc.edu/policy.php

**Military members**
Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible,

**Technology**
It is required that you have a computer with Internet access, microphone, and speakers. You must have a reliable Internet connection. Having to rely on the public library or Starbucks, for example, will likely make it challenging to have a consistent presence inside OAKS. If you are concerned, please contact me within the first week so we can determine if this course will be manageable for you. I have also included resources below if you have concerns about course access or financial burdens. If you have technical problems, please contact Student Computing Support or Helpdesk using these methods:

- Student Computing Support at 843-953-5457 or via email studentcomputingsupport@cofc.edu
- IT Helpdesk at 843-953-3375 or helpdesk@cofc.edu.

It’s important to resolve technical problems swiftly, so do not delay getting support. Computer failure or unavailability does not constitute an excuse for not completing assignment.

**OAKS**

OAKS, including Gradebook, will be used for this course throughout the semester to provide the syllabus and class materials and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted.

**Inclement Weather, Pandemic or Substantial Interruption of Instruction (3.8)**

If in-person classes are suspended, faculty will announce to their students a detailed plan for a change in modality to ensure the continuity of learning. All students must have access to a computer equipped with a web camera, microphone, and Internet access. Resources are available to provide students with these essential tools.

**Continuity of Learning**

Due to social distancing requirements, this class will include a variety of online and technology enhanced components to reinforce continuity of learning for all enrolled students. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan on the syllabus matches their own circumstances.

**Recording of Classes (via ZOOM)**

Class sessions will be recorded via both voice and video recording. By attending and remaining in this class, the student consents to being recorded. Recorded class sessions are for instructional use only and may not be shared with anyone who is not enrolled in the class.

**Community Standards**

While parts of this class are online, you are sharing the experience of working through important political problems with other people—not just usernames on a discussion board. Please bear this in mind when engaging with each other and be thoughtful in your contributions and generous in your interpretations.

**Netiquette**

Please bear in mind that online communication precludes many of the non-verbal cues that normally facilitate face-to-face communication. This being the case, it is important to err on the
side of generous interpretation and civility. What was written as a simple statement can easily come across as aggressive or argumentative.

Vignette: “Texting Confusion” from Key & Peele (Content warning: some spicy language): https://vimeo.com/121923151

General Guidelines:

- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in email, discussion posts, and any other communication.
- Please be civil: address people by the names and pronouns they specify.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Remember that all college-level communication should have correct spelling and grammar (this includes discussion board posts).
- Avoid slang terms (they may be misunderstood or confuse others) and texting abbreviations such as “r” instead of “are” or “u” for “you.”
- Use standard fonts such as Arial, Calibri or Times New Roman and use a size 10 or 12 pt. font.
- CAPS LOCK MAKES IT SOUND LIKE YOU ARE YELLING. PLEASE DO NOT YELL AT US.
- Avoid the use of emoticons and emojis; they are not appropriate for academic writing.
- Be cautious when using humor or irony. Tone is difficult to convey in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken amiss or come across in an offensive or passive-aggressive fashion.

Thank you for reading this syllabus. Below, please find a photo of my cat looking majestic, offered in appreciation of your effort.