INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE
(How to Think for Yourself about Politics)
Course website: through CANVAS

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Discussion sections:

In the information overload of the 21st century we are bombarded with messages and images telling us what to think about politics at local, state, national, and international levels. The aggressiveness and noise of political life lead many to simply tune out.

This course offers you the tools to sort through and grasp politics on your own terms. Rather than telling you what to think about politics—one way of analyzing or judging the world—it teaches you how to think about politics in a critical, thoughtful way. It teaches you to see the alternatives from which we can choose in political life: alternative ideologies, alternative institutions and policies around the world, and alternative ways to explain the politics that surround you.

With these tools we will survey and debate a variety of key topics in political life: the sovereign state, democracy, collective action, representation, policy-making, the politics of the economy, authoritarian governments and democratization, war and terrorism, and globalization. On most of these topics we will give special attention to how politics in the United States today compares to politics in other places and times, giving you opportunities to develop your own critical thinking about what to appreciate, defend, criticize, or change in the politics around you.

The expected learning outcomes from this course are that students will be able to:
1) Understand alternative arrangements of political institutions and practices around the world, including kinds of governments, forms of political participation, systems of representation, policy-making processes, patterns of political violence, and economic policies and regulations.
2) Identify the defining principles of major political ideologies like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, environmentalism, political Islamism, and apply their perspectives to political issues.
3) Propose multiple different basic explanations of any political event or action and suggest what kind of evidence would support each one.

As a broad introduction to a core social-science discipline that covers a very wide range of issues across history and places around the world, this course satisfies the Social Sciences group requirements.
**WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO**

1. **Attend class.** The lectures will highlight key themes and will always contain material that is not in the readings. Come to lecture and take good notes.

2. **Take quizzes.** Embedded in the reading will be a large number of quizzes that pose straightforward questions about the readings. Your two lowest quizzes will be dropped. It is critical to do the reading to get these easy points.

3. **Attend section every week.** Section attendance is recorded and required. You can miss one section without penalty; beyond that each unexcused absence takes 1% off your overall grade.

4. **Read.** Keeping up with the schedule of reading is fundamental to keeping up with the class. Most lectures will assume that you’ve done the reading and will drill deeper into certain subjects, so why bother coming to lecture (and failing quizzes) if you haven’t done the reading?

5. **Participate.** Talk in class, ask questions, or make me aware that you’re engaged in other ways. Do this even more in section. I know some people don’t like to talk in class; if that is you, come see me and/or the GTF in office hours and show us that you’re alive and interested.

4. **Check your email or other Canvas-linked messaging every day.** This is not optional at a 21st century university. I will often send you information through Canvas on scheduling, corrections to lectures, and other messages that you need to see. You can link Canvas to your email, texts, or other media. It is your responsibility to check whatever you have linked up regularly. Once I have sent you a message, I assume that you have that information.

5. **Weekly journal entries.** You will write 10-11 200-300 word journal entries related to readings and class discussions. Clear due dates will be posted.

6. **Midterm.** There will be an in-class midterm exam on [DATE]. It will consist of multiple choice or short-essay answers to straightforward questions about major points from readings and lectures. You will receive a study sheet before the exam. BRING GREEN BOOKS.

7. **Final Exam.** Comprehensive exam in our normal room, [TIME DATE]. It will consist of multiple choice or short-essay answers to straightforward questions about major points from readings and lectures. You will receive a study sheet before the exam and optional study sessions will be available. BRING GREEN BOOKS.

9. **Note the following policies:**

   **With apologies, no computers or tablets in class.** Presumably you come to class to listen, take notes, and participate. Computers are not necessary for any of these things, and it is too seductive for many people to take notes on a computer without checking social media every so often. To make this class the serious, engaged enterprise that it should be, please leave your computers at home or in a bag.

   **Give 24 hours advance notice or doctor’s letter to request excused absence or assignment extension.** Extensions requested within 24 hours of a deadline will generally not be granted. Late assignments lose a half letter grade each day. Assignments are due at the beginning of class, and a late penalty of one day (half grade) applies for assignments handed in later on the due date.
Use your own words and don’t cheat. I use software to compare journal entries to multiple databases. Plagiarism is serious business, as is cheating on closed-book exams like our midterm and final. At the very least cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the class; such cases will also be brought to the attention of the university, as required by university policy. See details at http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/programs/student_judi_affairs/.

Submit grading disputes in writing. If you want to dispute a grade on a paper or exam, please submit in writing a description of your concerns at least 24 hours after you have received the grade in question. The 24 hours should be used as a cooling off period. Please note, however, that if I or a GTF review your work, we will review the entire exam or paper. This can also result in a lower grade.

If an incomplete may be necessary, please let me know as soon as possible. In general incompletes will only be permitted under extenuating circumstances (health, family issues, emergency). Students who have outstanding assignments at the time that grades are due and who have not received preapproval for an incomplete will receive an “F” for the assignments they have not completed. In order to receive a passing grade you must complete all assignments.

EVALUATION

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal entries</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5% (includes attendance, vocal participation in class and/or coming to office hours)</td>
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COURSE MATERIALS

There is one required textbook, Introduction to Political Science: How to Think for Yourself about Politics, available at the UO bookstore. It is a new text by Prof. Parsons with Pearson Publishers. Additional short readings (newspaper articles etc.) may be posted on the Canvas site.

I. INTRODUCTION: BUILDING-BLOCKS OF POLITICAL THINKING

Mon. 9/26: How to think for yourself about politics (and ways to explain it)

Read for Weds. 9/28:

Parsons text, Ch. 1 (whole chapter, pp. 1-23) + Ch. 2 through section A3. Pp 25-42.

Watch 6 min 52 second video, The School of Life, “Political Theory: Niccolo Macchiavelli,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOXl0L1_t9s.

Weds. 9/28: Philosophical roots of today’s political science (I)

Read for Fri. 9/30:

Parsons text, Ch. 2 remainder. Pp. 43-55.
Fri. 9/30: Philosophical roots of today’s political science (II)

Journal entry: Before you started taking this class, what did “politics” mean to you?

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<tr>
<th>Read for Mon. 10/3:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parsons text, Ch. 3 through first half of section A2, “Classical Liberalism and Modern Liberalism,” Pp. 57-67.</td>
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Mon. 10/3: The liberal tradition (I): The meanings of liberalism

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<th>Read for Weds. 10/5:</th>
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Watch 6 min 45 second video, The School of Life, “Political Theory: Thomas Hobbes,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i4jb5XBX5s.

Weds. 10/5: The liberal tradition (II): Modern conservatism and its variants

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<th>Read for Fri. 10/7:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parsons text, Ch. 3 section A3. 71-76.</td>
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Watch 7 min 46 second video, The School of Life, “Political Theory: Jean-Jacques Rousseau,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81KfDXTTlXE.

Fri. 10/7: NO CLASS, BUT MUST DO QUIZ ON CANVAS AND WATCH VIDEO (available as of 10am, must be completed by 5pm)

Journal entry: Do you think that individual liberties should trump broader social purposes?

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<td>Parsons text, Ch. 3 remainder, Pp. 76-84.</td>
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Mon. 10/10: Socialists, fascists, environmentalists and Islamists: Any plausible critiques of the liberal tradition?

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<th>Read for Weds. 10/12:</th>
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Weds. 10/12: Is it good that our world is divided into states?

| Read for Fri. 10/14: |
Fri. 10/14: Explaining Afghanistan

Journal entry: Would our world be better or worse if anyone could freely migrate across all national borders?

Read for Mon. 10/17:  

Mon. 10/17: Is liberal democracy “rule of the people”?

Read for Weds. 10/19:  
Parsons text, Ch. 5 section A3. Pp. 135-144.


Weds. 10/19: Is limited or “illiberal” democracy ever acceptable?

Read for Fri. 10/21:  
Parsons text, Ch. 5 remainder. Pp. 144-162.

Fri. 10/21: What keeps China’s authoritarian government going?

Mon. 10/24: IN-CLASS MIDTERM  
WEEK 5

Read for Weds. 10/26:  
Parsons text, Ch. 6 (whole chapter). Pp. 163-194.

Weds. 10/26: Why do (or don’t) you and other individuals participate in politics?

Read for Fri. 10/28:  
Parsons text, Ch. 7 through section A2. Pp. 195-208.

Fri. 10/28: What are the best rules for democratic elections?

Journal entry: Should democratic governments incentivize or even require voting or volunteering?

Read for Mon. 10/31:  
WEEK 6

Parsons text, Ch. 7 section A3. Pp. 208-216.
Mon. 10/31: Parties: can’t live with ‘em, can’t live without ‘em?

Read for Weds. 11/2:

Parsons text, Ch. 7 sections A4 and A5, Pp. 216-228.


Weds. 11/2: What’s better: presidential or parliamentary government?

Read for Fri. 11/4:

Parsons text, Ch. 7 remainder, Pp. 229-234.


Fri. 11/4: Pulling it all together: is U.S. representation well designed?

Journal entry: Do you feel well represented in American politics? Discuss why or why not.

Read for Mon. 11/7: WEEK 7

Parsons text, Ch. 8 though section A1. Pp. 239-248.

Mon. 11/7: Legislators

Read for Weds. 11/9:

Parsons text, Ch. 8 through section A2. Pp. 248-260.

Weds. 11/9: Bureaucratic power: The death of democracy?

Read for Fri. 11/11:


Fri. 11/11: Judicial power: The death of democracy?

Journal entry: How much should military officers influence security policies in a democracy? How about environmental scientists and environmental policy?

Read for Mon. 11/14: WEEK 8

Parsons text, Ch. 9 (whole chapter). 288-316.

Watch 6 min 43 second video, The School of Life, “Political Theory: Adam Smith,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejJRhn53X2M.
Watch 9 min 27 second video, The School of Life, “Political Theory: Karl Marx,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISQgCy_iIce.

Mon. 11/14: Markets as political creations: is the free market good for you?

Read for Weds. 11/16:


Weds. 11/16: Challenges in economic policy

Read for Fri. 11/18:


Fri. 11/18: Development: what’s the best strategy for poorer countries?

Journal entry: In your view, how much does the current American economy provide equality of (economic) opportunity for its citizens?

Read for Mon. 11/21:

Parsons text, Ch. 10, remainder. Pp. 341-362.

Mon. 11/21: Growth: What does the US economy need today?

Read for Weds. 11/23:


Weds. 11/23: Explaining war: Is major war a problem of the past?

Journal entry: How likely is major war involving the United States in your lifetime? If it is imaginable, where might it happen?

Friday November 25 THANKSGIVING BREAK

Read for Mon. 11/28:


Mon. 11/28: Is terrorism the problem of the future?

Read for Weds. 11/30:

Parsons text, Ch. 13 through section A3. Pp. 460-496.
Weds. 11/30: Does globalization suck (your life chances away)?

Read for Fri. 12/2:

(no new reading)

Fri 12/2: Course conclusion

Journal entry: Is globalization bringing you better chances at a happy life or not? How?

Final exam in our normal room, TIME DATE. BRING GREEN BOOKS.