

POT 2002: Introduction to Political Theory (Summer 2025)

Instructor: Yuanxin Wang
Meeting Times: M, T, W, R, F 6 (3:30PM-4:45PM)
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OH: T & R 5-6PM, [By Appointment](#)

Course Description

This course introduces students to political theory as a distinct field of political inquiry. By surveying key thinkers and texts in the history of Western political thought, we will ask the following questions: What is politics, and what should it be? Who is involved in politics, and how should one live under political conditions? What is the nature of freedom, equality, democracy, power, and citizenship? Our approach will be mainly historical and conceptual. We will investigate how past political thinkers constructed theories of politics in their respective historical contexts, while attending to the contemporary relevance of these theoretical interventions reflectively.

This course qualifies for [UF's Humanities \(H\) Gen Ed requirement](#). It provides instruction in the history, key themes, principles, and terminology in the study of political theory. It emphasizes clear and effective analysis and approaches issues and problems from multiple perspectives. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

Course Objectives

Students are expected to understand key concepts, ideas, and themes in the development of Western political tradition. By the end of the course, they will be able to analyze the internal logic of each political thinker's theoretical project in particular historical contexts as well as their practical significance in understanding contemporary social and political phenomena. Moreover, students are expected to develop a reflexive perspective on the reading material. They will be encouraged to think critically and differently, and to construct their own arguments logically and persuasively.

Course Requirements

Your grade for this course will be based on four components:

1. Attendance and participation (15%; 5%, 10%)

Attendance (5%) in this course is expected. Role will be taken at the beginning of each class meeting. Excused absences must be consistent with university policies and require appropriate documentation. Additional information can be found [here](#). Students who miss more than 30% of the class (9 class meetings) will not be able to complete/pass the course.

Active in-class participation (10%) is essential to your achievement in this course. When you come to class, you should come prepared to discuss the material that has been assigned for that class. This means that you are expected to do the reading to be covered during a given class in advance and bring your personal insights to an open and fruitful discussion.

2. Weekly reflections (30%; 5% each)

In addition to participating during class, you are required to prepare a short reflection (6 in total) for each Friday class meeting which is based on a seminar format. The reflection paper should be based on the week's reading and highlight some passages/arguments/ideas that you find important and/or intriguing. Each reflection paper should consist of three components:

- (i) Passage(s) from the reading (with page number, if available) that have drawn your attention.
- (ii) A brief explanation of how and why certain arguments/concepts/assumptions in the selected passage are inconsistent, unconvincing, and/or "puzzling" (i.e. something worth further exploration and open to different responses) (100-150 words).
- (i) Your interpretation of and tentative response to the puzzle (300-400 words). Please note that this is the most important element of the weekly reflection, which requires interpretive labor and critical analysis in addressing questions such as: What are the theoretical implications and/or practical significance of the problem? Does the author allude to any explanation/solution in the text? If not, what do you think should be done with it?

These weekly reflections must be turned in via Canvas **by Thursday midnight** of each week (except for week 1 and 6). Given the timely nature of this assignment, no late submission or retrospective make-up will be accepted. If you foresee a genuine emergency or conflict, get in touch with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodation.

You are NOT required to submit the reflection on the week you are assigned for group presentation. Your grade for that week's reflection will be based on your presentation grade. (For example, if you receive a 90 for the group presentation, your grade for that week's reflection will be $5 \times 90\% = 4.5$)

3. Essays (40%; 20% each)

You are required to write **2** longer essays (1300-1500 words) on topics covered by the course. The essays must remain grounded in the details of the texts and examine their broader theoretical import. Prompts will be provided in advance.

The first essay must be turned in by **July 20**, and the second essay by **August 9**. The highest grade for a late essay in the absence of a legitimate excuse is C+. Please be aware: a "C+" is NOT the lowest grade a late assignment can receive; it is the highest (i.e., it is the ceiling, not the floor).

4. Group Presentation (15%)

Each group is expected to give a thematic presentation at the beginning of the Friday seminar. The presentation should have four components:

- (i) A descriptive account of a particular concept or argument from that week's reading: Where and how does *the author* elaborate on the concept/argument?
- (ii) An interpretive account of the selected concept/argument *from your perspective*. You are expected to address the following questions: Why is it important to his/her political theory? Do you find the concept/argument (or any of its elements) convincing, problematic, and/or incomplete?
- (iii) A related empirical case (e.g. recent or historical events, novels, dramas, movies, music) that clarifies the relevance of selected concept/argument for us and contributes to a better understanding of its theoretical import. You are expected to provide necessary background information about the case and explain its relevance to your theoretical reflection on the reading.
- (iv) 3-4 well-articulated discussion questions. Interpretive questions (i.e. "why", "how", "in what ways") are preferred to purely descriptive questions (i.e. "what") regarding their potential contribution to discussion.

You will have 15-20 minutes to present before holding a Q&A session. At 20 minutes, your group will be asked to stop the presentation regardless of your progress. The presentation should be facilitated by PowerPoint slides (or equivalent), which must be uploaded **by noon the day you present**. DO NOT read your notes, scripts, or presentation slides verbatim. Talking directly to your audience is essential to an interactive and engaging presentation.

Your presentation grade breaks down into three parts: (i) the overall performance of the group and the quality of the slides (e.g. organization of information, legibility of slides, use of graphics) (5%); (ii) your individual performance during the presentation and the Q&A (5%); (iii) peer review of other members of the group (5%).

A sign-up sheet for group assignment and presentation schedule will be circulated at the beginning of the semester.

Grading Policy

The course is out of 100 total points, and the Grading Scale is as follows: 93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C); 70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 63-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); 0-59 (E; failing)

More information on UF grading policy may be found at [Grades and Grading Policies](#). Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](#). *Please note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.*

Required Texts

All readings can be found on the course's Canvas page. Course material and details in this syllabus are subject to change. Any such changes will be announced in advance on Canvas.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

1. The email they receive from GatorEvals,
2. Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or
3. The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available [here](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#). Note: Starting in Spring 2025, the central portal will change to <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>. The previous GatorEvals link (<https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>) will redirect to the updated portal for one year.

Academic Integrity

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

Policy Regarding In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action

instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact [Dr. Ben Smith](#). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to [the University Ombuds Office](#) or [the Dean of Students Office](#).

Resources

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Health and Wellness Resources

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- *Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- *Student Complaints On-Campus*: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).

- *On-Line Students Complaints:* [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Readings and Assignments Schedule

***Please note that the syllabus can be changed as needed during the semester. ***

***These mandatory readings might be complemented with additional readings through the semester, provided by instructor. ***

Week 1 (Jun 30- Jul 4) The Birth of Political Theory: Socrates and Athenian Democracy

Jun 30 (M) Introduction & Syllabus Walkthrough

Jul 1 (T) Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*

Recommended: Thucydides, “Pericles’s Funeral Oration”

Jul 2 (W) Plato, *The Republic*, Book I (all), pp. 576-605

Jul 3 (R) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

Jul 4 (F) No Class (Independence Day)

**Weekly 1 reflection will be due by midnight, July 2.*

Week 2 (Jul 7-11) Theorizing Politics: From Ancient to Modern

Jul 7 (M) Plato, *The Republic*, Book II (357a-379a), Book III (412a-417b), Book IV (419a-435c), pp.605-625, 656-677

Jul 8 (T) Plato, *The Republic*, Book V (462a-466d, 471c-480), Book VII (514a-521c), Book VIII (555b-562a), pp.701-705, 710-720, 747-753, 783-790

Jul 9 (W) Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter, Chapter 1-3, 5-9

Jul 10 (R) Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter 15, 17-19, 25, 26; *Discourses on Livy*, Book I, Chapter 2, 3, 9

Jul 11 (F) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

Week 3 (Jul 14-18) The Political Theory of Liberalism

Jul 14 (M) John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 1-3, 5, 7 (pp.323-326)

Jul 15 (T) John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 8, 9, 11-13

Jul 16 (W) Locke in/and America

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 18, 19

- Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*
- Thomas Jefferson's letter to James Madison
- James Madison's Letter to Thomas Jefferson

Jul 17 (R) Locke in/and America

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 4, 6, 7 (pp.318-323)
- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the state of Virginia*
- David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*
- Abigail Adams's letters to John Adams and Mercy Otis Warren

Recommended: John Locke, Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina

Jul 18 (F) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

**First essay will be due by midnight, July 20.*

Week 4 (Jul 21-25) Democracy, Social Contract, and Revolution

Jul 21 (M) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, pp. 45-55, 60-82, 87-92

Jul 22 (T) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter 1-8; Book II, Chapter 1-5

Jul 23 (W) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter 6-11; Book III, Chapter 1-7; Book IV, Chapter 1, 2

Jul 24 (R) Rousseau and the Revolution(s)

- French National Assembly, *Declaration of the Rights of Man*
- Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman*
- Toussaint L'Ouverture, "Proclamation", "Letter to the General Assembly from Biassou"; Haitian Constitution of 1801

Jul 25 (F) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

Week 5 (Jul 28-Aug 1) Interpreting the Revolution: Conservatism and Feminism

Jul 28 (M) Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp.417-458

Jul 29 (T) Edmund Burke, Revolution, and Beyond

- Edmund Burke, *Inquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, pp.63-81
- Edmund Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, pp. 488-499

Jul 30 (W) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, pp. 5-16, 29-33, 37-52

Jul 31 (R) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 65-68, 71-75, 76-92, 119-125, 228-229, 280-283

Aug 1 (F) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

Week 6 (Aug 4-8) Theorizing the Color Line

Aug 4 (M) W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought, Chapter 1, 2, 9

Aug 5 (T) W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 3, 4, 7

Aug 6 (W) Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Part I

Aug 7 (R) In-Class Presentation & Discussion

Aug 8 (F) No Class (Working on Essay 2)

**Weekly 6 reflection will be due by midnight, August 6.*

**Second essay will be due by midnight, August 9.*