

Political Science 355
Modern Political Thought
3.0 Credits

Spring Semester, 2017
Classroom: Sage Hall 3215
Time: Mondays 6:00 - 9:00
Political Science Department

Dr. James R. Simmons
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Course Description:

The assumption underlying this course is that politics is so vitally determinative of the character of social life that ways must be found to let students ask (and answer) questions about how well the political system functions and how its operations might be improved. Critical, independent, and evaluative thinking requires more than a practical understanding of modern regimes or a passive consumption of the ideological rhetoric of everyday political debates. The problems of analysis require that the individual is able to examine his or her own beliefs as well as the basic assumptions underlying the contemporary political process. As a means for facilitating this task, this course will provide the student with an opportunity to examine the manner in which major theorists have attempted to answer basic political questions and the impact their answers have had on modern discourse. More specifically, for the purposes of this course, we will critically analyze the thought and writings of political philosophers from Thomas Hobbes to the present.

Required Readings:

Arnhart, Larry. *Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls*.

Brown, Robert. *Classical Political Theories: From Plato to Marx*.

General Education Objectives:

- To contribute to a liberal education of students by clarifying the manifold ways in which government and politics influences the quality of their lives and shapes their opportunities for personal success and self-actualization.
- To prepare students for active citizenship by providing them with essential knowledge about the political process as well as useful participatory skills.
- To provide a rigorous intellectual environment in which students are given analytical tools, learn research methods, and develop a capacity for clearly articulate their arguments, ideas, and values.

Requirements and Assessment:

- 1) Two Examinations (50%)- Exams may include an essay, short answers, identifications, and multiple-choice questions. Exam dates will be announced.

- 2) Term Paper (30%)- A 10 to 12 page critical analysis of a theory, thinker or political concept must be written by each student. Topics must be cleared with the instructor and utilize a standard stylistic format.
- 3) Discussion (20%)- Class presentations and daily oral participation. Students will be asked to be primary participants in two theoretical discussions.

Topics:

Readings:

I. Foundations of Modern Thought

Arnhart

Brown

A. Perennial Questions

Intro

Intro

B. Pre-Modern Thought

Intro

pp. 199-215

C. Absolutist Government

ch. 7

pp. 216-248

D. Classical Liberalism

ch. 8

pp. 269-312

E. Participatory Democracy

ch. 9

pp. 340-362

F. Conservatism and Reaction

ch. 9

pp. 363-384

Mid-Term Examination

II. Contemporary Political Ideology

Arnhart

Brown

A. The Modern State

ch. 10

pp. 385-462

B. Socialism and Anarchism

ch. 10

Handout

C. Marxian Communism

ch. 11

pp. 466-514

D. Modern Liberalism

ch. 11

pp. 420-465

E. Fascism and Nihilism

ch. 12

F. Today's Isms and Ologies

ch. 13

Final Examination