Sample Course Syllabus

Political Science 362
Modern Political Thought
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Syllabus
(your road map--keep close at hand, consult regularly)

COURSE OVERVIEW & LEARNING OBJECTIVES
During PS 362 we will be engaging modern political thought in a couple of concurrent ways. First, we will be interrogating the work of five major political thinkers in the Western Political Tradition. Our inquiries will be “critical” in the sense that we will be immersing ourselves in the substance of each thinker’s writings, asking them challenging questions, bringing thoughtful skepticism to bear and, ultimately, fashioning informed judgments about the merits of their creations. In short, we will be assessing key elements of the Canon of Modern Western Political Thought. Second, throughout our inquiries, we will be involved in the activity of political thinking itself. Far from being merely an academic exercise in dusting off and surveying moldy old tomes by venerable dead white men, our online conversations are designed to employ these brilliant yet inevitably partial designs as a point of departure from which each of us can formulate, sharpen, refine, and explain our own political philosophy. In short, we will be doing political philosophy. During PS 362 we also will use these historical works to think about some of the perennial issues of political life: the nature of politics; the basis of political obligation; the relation between the individual and the community; the nature of justice; the relation between morality and self-interest; human nature; and the ideal political regime, among others. The format of the course includes a variety of provided narrative materials, but it focuses primarily on discussion. Because this is a class in which students take major responsibility for their own and their colleagues’ learning, engaged participation is mandatory. For each activity/discussion/assignment in which you fail to participate, your final grade will be lowered ½ letter, up to three unexcused deficiencies. A fourth incidence of being AWOL, you fail the course.

The learning objectives of PS 362 are:
- Students will become familiar with challenging, foundational primary and secondary materials, becoming able to discuss those materials in an informed way.
- Students will develop skills in critical reading, thinking, and assessment.
- Students will strengthen their writing skills by composing a variety of graded and ungraded assignments.
- Students will enhance their proficiency at learning in a virtual educational environment.
- Students will be able to articulate, at least rudiments of, their own understanding of politics and political life.

REQUIRED BOOKS (available from OSU Book Store)
Steven M. Cahn, Classics in Modern Political Theory: Machiavelli to Mill (1997)
Robert L. Heilbroner, Marxism: For and Against (1980)
Susan Moller Okin, Women in Western Political Thought (1979)
Glen Tinder, Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions (2009)

1The most effective way to contact Professor Foster is via e-mail. He checks his e-mail regularly, and responds quickly to student queries.
2There are additional readings for PS 362. These readings will be posted on line.
For textbook accuracy, please check the textbook list at the OSU Bookstore website (http://www.osubeaverstore.com/). Syllabi may not have the most up to date textbook information!

WEEKLY TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**Instructions**

Read in advance, and be prepared to discuss, the assigned reading materials listed below. Have all reading materials close at hand so you can annotate them in light of our online conversations.

Week 1
Introducing/reconnoitering/orienting:
how to “take” this class
What is “politics”? – 4 preliminary understandings
  - Aristotle (“master science of the good”)
  - David Easton (“authoritative allocation of value”)
  - James Foster (“social activity of choosing”)
  - Harold Lasswell (who gets what, when, how)
Politics and vision (Wolin)
Why paradox is “everything” (Kierkegaard)

Week 2
Dialectics of thinking and talking about “politics”
“Why engage in political thinking?” (Tinder, Introduction, Chap. 1)
The “politics” of political discourse (Connolly, Prefaces X3, Introduction, Chaps. 1 & 6)

Week 3
defining political concepts I:
power (Tinder, Chaps. 4-6; Connolly, Chap. 3)
freedom (Connolly, Chap. 4)

Week 4
defining political concepts II:
inequality and equality (Tinder, Chap. 3)
change (Connolly, Chap. 5; Tinder, Chap. 7)
→first think piece essay due (all)←

Week 5
women in Western Political Thought: “on lies, secrets and silence”—Adrienne Rich
The nature and participation of women (Okin, Introduction)
Functionalism, Feminism and the Family Okin, Part V)

Week 6
Thomas Hobbes and “mushroom men”
Seyla Benhabib, “The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory” (on electronic reserve)

3I am using the word “take” in a couple of senses: (1) what you need to do in order grasp course materials fully, produce exemplary work products, and succeed completely as a student in PS 362; (2) what you need to know in order to survive and to endure and to prosper in this rigorously challenging course.
Cahn, pp. 78-196

Week 7
John Locke and “the sexual contract”
Carole Pateman, Chap. 1, Contracting In (on electronic reserve)
Cahn, pp. 213-319
→second think piece essay

Week 8
Jean-Jacques Rousseau and The Outsiders’ Society (“daughters of educated men”)
Okin, Part III
Cahn pp. 366-485
→Extra Credit: Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*[^4]

Week 9
John Stuart Mill—incomplete feminist
Okin, Part IV
Cahn, pp. 928-1022
→third think piece essay

Week 10
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (class→race→gender→class)
Heilbroner, all
Gloria Joseph, “The Incompatible Menage à Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism” (on electronic reserve)
Cahn, pp. 836-927 (selective)
→fourth think piece essay

→capstone essay due Thursday of finals week

**WEEKLY UNGRADED (MANDATORY) WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**
You will be “writing your way through the term.” Ungraded writings are designed to be diagnostic, to re-enforce course themes, to provide avenues for communication, and to hold you accountable for course reading assignments. These ungraded writings can take many forms

1. Some of these writings will be semi-impromptu exercises. One week, for example, students will be asked to write down one idea they understood from reading assigned for that segment; or one idea they did not understand. Another example: At the end of a week students might be asked to write down one question they'd like addressed during the following week. A third example: at the end of a week students might be asked to write a brief paragraph summarizing the major lines of analysis and argument discussed during that week.

2. Throughout class, students will prepare twice-weekly (due Mondays and Fridays) one-page "reader's responses" to aspects of the reading assignment, and be prepared to have them shared with the whole class. This assignment requires you to identify the major theme(s) in each week's reading and to offer your thoughtful comments on this theme. These commentaries are designed to structure your active class participation by obliging you to stay current in the readings, and by to providing you with a means to

[^4]: To earn up to an extra 100 points, you need to read Virginia Woolf’s essay, then write a five page essay in which you summarize the substance of Woolf’s arguments and discuss the pertinence of her analysis to understanding modern political thought. This extra credit assignment is due Thursday of Finals Week.
“think out loud” about your responses to class themes, to our common readings, and/or other class materials. You are being asked to enrich class meetings as an active learner, by sharing thoughts generated by your reading, and to enlist your class colleagues’ assistance in your efforts to test, to refine, and to articulate your responses. In short, to start a conversation thread. For each week, between Week 1 and Week 10 (20 total), you must post two 250-word (1 typescript page) reader’s response to aspects of the reading material assigned for that week. N.B. Each time you fail to post a response essay, your final grade will be lowered by ½ letter; fail to post four responses and you fail PS 362.

**GRADED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

Your grade in PS 362 will be determined on the basis of your work on:

1. two out of three “think piece” essays;
2. a final synthetic, “capstone” essay.

A think piece essay addressing issues raised during the first four weeks of class is required of all students. After that students may choose on which two of the following three segments s/he will write a paper. The lowest paper grade will be dropped, the remaining two think piece essay grades will be added to the grade on your capstone essay, to calculate your final course grade.

**What is a "think piece"?** It is an essay that gives you the opportunity to reflect, consider, ponder—that is, think about—the ideas presented in our common readings. I expect that, in your think pieces, you will make a conscientious attempt to examine intelligently a topic from a personal point of view. Think piece essays are not designed as research papers. You will have read the assignments in our common readings. Now, consider the questions, issues, and information discussed by classmates, and present your own thoughtful interpretation of each writing which you address. Think about your ideas; then illustrate your points with examples from your own experience and/or other works or sources. Think pieces are almost always enriched with your own experiences, if you connect those experiences to the topic you are addressing. While reflecting, feel free to discuss your ideas with others in the class and/or with me. I encourage such exchanges of ideas, but you must write your own paper. Think pieces in PS 362 run about a fifteen-hundred words—that is, about 5 double-spaced typescript pages. N.B. I might be sharing selected think piece essays with class.

**What is a “capstone essay”?** It is an essay (see fn 6) that gives you the opportunity to pull together—that is, synthesize—in a comprehensive manner your perspectives on your term’s study of modern political thought. I expect that you will use your capstone essay to reflect on what you will take away from PS 362. Imagine a friend, partner, relative asks you: “What did you learn in Modern Political Thought?” Your answer is your capstone essay.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Since you have significant time to work on your essays, you have the opportunity and the access to resources to draft, revise, and finalize essays that are informed, well crafted, and knowledgeable. Consequently, **my expectations** for the quality of your work are considerably higher than for, say, an in-class exam. I will be grading your essays on the basis of their (1) organization; (2) clarity of expression; (3) pertinence

5 PS 362 written assignments must be word processed.

All written assignments must be posted by the deadline. No late assignments will be accepted. No mailed assignments will be accepted.

Each student must complete ALL assignments. Failure to hand in any assignment (with the exception of the reader’s response, explained above, p. 3) will result in failing the course.

6 An essay is a short composition in which the author attempts, or endeavors, to present his/her thought-full views on a subject.
to the topic being addressed; (4) thoughtfulness; (5) completeness; and (6) incorporation of appropriate course materials.

Assignment due dates:

- mandatory think piece: Friday of Week 4
- second think piece: Friday of Week 7
- third think piece: Friday of Week 9
- fourth think piece: Friday of Week 10
- capstone essay (& extra credit essay): Thursday of Finals Week

**GRADE CALCULATION**

Your grade for PS 362 will be calculated as follows:

- two of three think pieces (200 points possible each): 400 total points possible
- capstone essay: 300 “ “
- extra credit essay: 700 “ “

→ [extra credit essay: 100 “ “]

PS 362 scale:

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<th>Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>700-665</td>
<td>(100-95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>664-630</td>
<td>(94-90%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>629-595</td>
<td>(89-85%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>594-581</td>
<td>(84-83)%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>580-560</td>
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<tr>
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<td>510-490</td>
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<tr>
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<td>454-441</td>
<td>(64-63%)</td>
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<td>(62-60%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>419 points &amp; below</td>
<td>(59%)</td>
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**Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities**

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations approved through SSD are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through SSD should contact SSD immediately at 737-4098.

**Academic Integrity and Student Conduct:**

Students are expected to abide by all OSU regulations regarding student conduct, especially those pertaining to academic honesty. You must properly cite any sources used in writing your papers (including internet sources) and work alone. Violations of academic honesty will result in failing the course, and will be reported to the proper university authorities for further action. For a description of Oregon State’s policies on student conduct and academic honesty, see the website at: [http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/index.htm](http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/index.htm).

**Course Evaluation**

We encourage you to engage in the course evaluation process each term – online, of course. The
evaluation form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions via ONID. You will login to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.