

# Introduction to Political Theory

## POLS 1200A: Spring SEMESTER 2024

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| Class Schedule:     | 1:10 – 2:00 pm Monday, Wednesday, Friday                         |
| Classroom:          | Lafayette Hall L207  |
| Instructor:         | Assistant Professor Minh Ly                                      |
| Office:             | 522 Old Mill   |
| Office Hours:       | 3:00 – 5:00 pm Thursday and by appointment                       |
| Email:              | <a href="mailto:Minh.Ly@uvm.edu">Minh.Ly@uvm.edu</a>             |
| Teaching Assistant: | Jack Pitblado  |
| Office:             | 524 Old Mill   |
| Office Hours:       | TBA  |
| Email:              | <a href="mailto:John.Pitblado@uvm.edu">John.Pitblado@uvm.edu</a> |

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### COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course introduces students to political theory, which examines vital ethical questions about politics. We will explore: what do the values of freedom and equality require of us as citizens and of our government? What rights are we entitled to claim? Do we have any duty to obey our government, and what are the limits of that obligation? Is patriotism a virtue? Why establish governments, and what are their legitimate aims? What is the best form of government, and should we prefer democracy? We live out answers every day to these questions; they are inescapable. The answers we reach guide our decisions to vote, to protest, and to speak out as citizens. What political theory contributes is a rigorous study of these subjects, informed by the most influential books that have profoundly shaped our Constitution and our political thinking to this day. Our purpose as citizens will determine our future as a democracy – and whether we will continue to have one.

### Class Attendance

If you want to earn a high grade, you should attend lecture in-person consistently. The texts cover a vast terrain, and it will take considerable time to navigate all the material without the compass and map offered by lecture. Each lecture will begin with a PowerPoint slide distilling the most crucial points from the reading. The exam questions will draw heavily on these key concepts, so be sure to organize your note-taking around these important terms. I will display the lecture outline at the start of each class. The most efficient way to study is to attend lecture so that you know what to focus on learning and achieve proficiency in the core concepts.

**Teaching Assistant:** Jack Pitblado is working as our teaching assistant. Please email or meet with Jack first for your course related questions, and he will be happy to help. If further support is needed, I am available to consult during office hours and by email.

## Classroom Computer Policy to Enhance Student Learning

To create an optimal educational environment liberated from distractions, our classroom is free of electronic devices. This includes laptop computers and phones—they cannot be used in class. Because of privacy regulations, lectures cannot be recorded electronically. Please silence your cell phones before class begins. Studies have shown that taking notes by hand greatly improves retention and enhances student learning.

### Course Requirements

#### 1. *Attendance and Reading Quizzes*

Since joining the class is crucial to your doing well and learning, the instructional staff will take **attendance** at the beginning of every lecture. This counts towards **10% of your grade**. To create a seating chart, the place you select the first day will be your seat. There will be assigned reading for each class session. I expect you to finish the reading assignment before class and to come prepared to discuss it. It is highly recommended that you bring a printout or text of the assigned readings with you to class, along with any reading notes you have taken. Around once every two weeks, in the first five minutes of one of the class sessions, I will give an unannounced reading quiz. The quiz will either be a brief multiple choice format, or a short written response to a question. The quiz questions will draw from the major theme of the reading assignment due that day. Quizzes will be graded on a scale from 0 to 10.

Grading policy: The teaching assistant will grade quizzes for accuracy and detail. The more accurate and detailed your answer, the higher your score will be. If you are absent the day I give a quiz, you will receive a score of zero on the quiz.

**There are no make-up quizzes, but I will drop your lowest quiz score when calculating your final grade.** If you are present in class but didn't do the reading and you simply answer "present" for your quiz, you will get an automatic three points. **The reading quizzes will account for 10% of your final grade.**

#### 2. *Mid-Term Exams*

You will take two exams during the term, on **February 26<sup>th</sup>** and **April 8<sup>th</sup>**. These will take place during our regularly scheduled class period. The exams will be "short answer" tests, with the questions drawn from the lecture outlines that I will use each class. I will discuss the exams with you in the weeks before you take them. **Each exam will be worth 25% of your final grade, or 50% total combining the two exams.**

#### 3. *Final Exam*

The final exam will be held on **Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm** in our usual classroom, Lafayette L207. The exam will involve short answer questions along with one or more longer essay questions. **The final exam will be worth 30% of your grade.**

**Note: You must complete all three exams to pass the course.**

## Required Books

The following books are available at the UVM bookstore at the Davis Center. They are also available for purchase online. *Please use these editions if you can, so that we're all able to stay on the same page.*

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Hackett)  
Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (Hackett)  
Eitan Hersch, *Politics is for Power* (Scribner)

## Blackboard

I have created a webpage for this class through Blackboard, where you will find the course syllabus and course readings organized by week.

## Office Hours

The teaching assistant, Jack Pitblado, will hold regular office hours in the teaching assistant's office at Old Mill 524. I will host regular office hours at Old Mill 522 on Thursday 3-5 pm. I am also available by appointment, should your class schedule require meeting outside of the regular office hours.

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## WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS

### PART I: Political Authority and Political Obligation

#### Week 1 (January 15 to January 20)

January 15: Martin Luther King Day (holiday before start of classes)  
There is no reading assignment for Wednesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, the first class.

Please read for Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>:

Ezra Klein, "How Politics Makes Us Stupid" [Bb]

Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (short excerpt) [Bb]

\*Optional: Stromberg, "Why You Should Take Notes by Hand – Not on a Laptop" [Bb]

\*Optional: Gorlick, "Media Multitaskers Pay Mental Price"

#### Week 2 (January 22 to 26)

Plato, *Apology* (in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*)

#### Week 3 (January 29 to February 2)

Plato, *Crito* (in *The Trial and Death of Socrates*)

**Week 4 (February 5 to February 9)**

Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-19), pp. 78-82 [Bb]

David Graeber, "Are You an Anarchist? The Answer May Surprise You!" [Bb]

Lucy Parsons, "The Principles of Anarchism" [Bb]

\*Optional: Anarchist Writers, "What Would an Anarchist Society Look Like?" [Bb]

**Week 5 (February 12 to February 16)**

Joseph Tussman, *Obligation and the Body Politic*, pp. 3-11, 23-39 [Bb]

Christopher Wellman, "Samaritanism and the Duty to Obey the Law," pp. 3-24, 30-33 [Bb]

\*Optional: Wellman, "Military Service" [Bb]

**Week 6 (February 19 to February 23)**

February 19: President's Day holiday (no class)

Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" [Bb]

**Week 7 (February 26 to March 1)**

**February 26: Mid-term exam**

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" [Bb]

George Kateb, "Is Patriotism a Mistake?" pp. 906-923. [Bb]

Stephen Macedo, "Just Patriotism?" [Bb]

William Galston, "In Defense of a Reasonable Patriotism" [Bb]

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-defense-of-a-reasonable-patriotism/>

**PART II: Democracy**

**Week 8 (March 4 to March 8)**

John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, pp. 399-407, 410-412 [Bb]

Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value" (excerpt) [Bb]

Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (excerpts) [Bb]

\*Optional: Fishkin, "The Nation In a Room: Turning Public Opinion Into Policy" [Bb]

**Week 9 (March 11 to March 15)**

**Spring Recess holiday (no class)**

Note: it is strongly recommended that you **begin reading Eitan Hersch's *Politics is for Power*** since it is a longer reading.

\*Optional: Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*, Chapter II [Bb]

**Week 10 (March 18 to March 22)**

Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists* (excerpts) [Bb]  
Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (excerpt) [Bb]

**Week 11 (March 25 to March 29)**

Eitan Hersch, *Politics Is for Power*, pp. 1-83, 101-217.

**PART III: Freedom**

**Week 12 (April 1 to April 5)**

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor* [Bb]  
Adam Swift, "Liberty," pp. 51-77 [Bb]  
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1

**Week 13 (April 8 to April 12)**

**April 8: Second mid-term exam**

Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch 2 (entire)  
April 12 (no class, Stanford conference)

**Week 14 (April 15 to April 19)**

April 15 (no class, Stanford conference)  
Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch 3 (pp. 55-58, 60), Ch 4 (entire)  
Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch 5

**Week 15 (April 22 to April 26)**

Yuval Levin, "Taking the Long Way: Disciplines of the Soul are the Basis of a Liberal Society" [Bb]  
Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pp. 70-81 [Bb]

**Week 16 (April 29 to May 3)**

Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pp. 473-491 [Bb]

Summary and overview of readings to prepare for final.

**Final exam date: Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm in Lafayette L207**

1200 A GP Intro to Political Theory 09-MAY-2024 1330 1615 LAFAYE L207

## **CLASSROOM PROTOCOL**

The Department of Political Science requires that this classroom protocol, defining minimum standards of conduct, be included in all syllabi.

1. Students are expected to attend and be prepared for ALL regularly scheduled classes.
2. Students are expected to arrive on time and stay in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that he/she will need to leave early, he/she should notify the instructor before the class period begins.
3. Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt class by leaving and reentering during class, must not distract class by making noise, and must be attentive to comments being made by the instructors and by peers.

### **Covid Policy**

Since some students are in contact with older relatives, or immunocompromised, it is strongly advised as a responsible member of your community that you wear a mask during class and in office hours. Students are encouraged to stay in their residence and contact Student Health Services (SHS) if they feel ill.

If a student will not be able to attend in-person classes for qualifying health reasons, SHS will send a notification to the appropriate student services office or designated staff member informing them of this along with the dates the student is unable to attend. The SHS notification will specify whether the request for flexibility is only around in-person class attendance or includes additional flexibility for assignments and tests because the student is too ill to participate. Students are responsible for working with their faculty to make up class content and work they miss due to a documented illness.

### **Religious Holidays**

If you wish to be excused from class or work because of a religious holiday, please email me about the holiday(s) by the end of the second week of class, and we'll work something out.

### **Students with Disabilities**

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact ACCESS, the office of Disability Services on campus. ACCESS works with students and faculty to create reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to professors with suggested accommodations as early as possible each semester. Contact ACCESS: A170 Living/Learning Center; 802-656-7753; [access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu); or [www.uvm.edu/access](http://www.uvm.edu/access).

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

### **Student Learning Accommodations**

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact SAS, the office of Disability Services on campus. SAS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations, which are communicated to faculty in an accommodation letter. All students are strongly encouraged to meet with their faculty to discuss the accommodations they plan to use in each course. A student's accommodation letter lists those accommodations that will not be implemented until the student meets with their faculty to create a plan.

Contact SAS: A170 Living/Learning Center; 802-656-7753; [access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu)  
[www.uvm.edu/access](http://www.uvm.edu/access)

**Academic Integrity:** The policy addresses plagiarism, fabrication, collusion, and cheating. <https://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf>

**Grading:** For information on grading and GPA calculation, go to <https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/grades>

**Code of Student Conduct:** <http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/studentcode.pdf>

**FERPA Rights Disclosure:** The purpose of this policy is to communicate the rights of students regarding access to, and privacy of their student educational records as provided for in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974.

<http://catalogue.uvm.edu/undergraduate/academicinfo/ferparightsdisclosure/>

**Promoting Health & Safety:** The University of Vermont's number one priority is to support a healthy and safe community.

**Center for Health and Wellbeing:** <https://www.uvm.edu/health>

**Counseling & Psychiatry Services (CAPS)** Phone: (802) 656-3340

**C.A.R.E.** If you are concerned about a UVM community member or are concerned about a specific event, we encourage you to contact the Dean of Students Office (802-656-3380). If you would like to remain anonymous, you can report your concerns online by visiting the Dean of Students website at: <https://www.uvm.edu/studentaffairs>

**Final Exam Policy:** The University final exam policy outlines expectations during final exams and explains timing and process of examination period:  
<https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/final-exams>