

POLS 2023/3143

Introduction to Political Theory

Zap # 1653

Meets: MW 4:00-5:15 PM

Room: PH 314

Fall 2009

Credit Hours: 3

Instructor: Dr. Ken Hicks

Office: Will Rogers Auditorium Basement Room 110

Telephone: (918) 343-7687

Email: kennethicks@rsu.edu

Webpage: <http://www.rsu.edu/faculty/hicks>

Course Introduction and Objectives

“Instead of predictions, I would suggest that theorists have been intent on posting warnings.”

Sheldon S. Wolin

Political theory is a subset of the discipline of political science, and has a number of interrelated concerns. Political philosophy began as the study of the traditions of political philosophy, ranging from the pre-Socratic Greeks to medieval European theological texts to modern thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and

Marx. In the middle of the 20th century, political theory was increasingly viewed as a beginning point for the behavioral study of political phenomenon. Many political theorists insist that the core purpose of political theory is to provide the critical framework for questioning basic organizing principles of society with a view to its reordering. Others offer much more limited analytical aspirations, contending that political theorists should confine themselves to the study of the study of the potential meaning immanent in political narratives. This course is organized into three units -- with one introducing students to ancient and medieval theorists, another dealing with selected modern theorists, and a third dealing with the concerns of critical theorists --with the intent to provide a survey of the core traditions of political theory.

Successful students in this course will:

- be able to associate ideas and concepts to specific political theorists;
- be able to competently employ the vocabulary of political theory;
- be able to trace the evolution of political ideas from the ancient to the modern to the post-modern;
- have an enhanced ability to engage with others in political discourse analyzing contemporary political issues;
- possess a greater awareness of the relevance of perennial issues (e.g. justice, order, equality, freedom, etc.) for understanding contemporary events.

In short, this course is designed to expose students to an approach to thinking about politics that will materially aid their comprehension of other political science courses, but will also help them think analytically about broader human concerns as well.

“In principle, history cannot come to an end, but there might be no first-rate minds willing to study it.”

Judith Shklar

Required Texts and Materials

Two texts are required:

Klosko, George (1995) *History of Political Theory: An Introduction, Vol. 2*, Belmont, CA, Thomson-Wadsworth.

Wolin, Sheldon (2004) *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

“Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Additional reading materials may be assigned as indicated by the instructor. Material will be assigned selectively from the two primary texts.

Course Requirements

“Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.”

Bertrand Russell

POLS 2023/3143 is fundamentally a course about how to think about political thought. The successful completion of each task will be worth a set number of points, which will contribute to students’ overall course grade.

1. **Attendance/Participation (175 Points; 25%).** The core of this course is discussion; therefore, attendance is required. Students with perfect attendance will earn 20 bonus points, while students with in excess of three unexcused absences risk earning a failing attendance grade. Attendance will be monitored by the instructor, who reserves the right to assign a failing overall grade to students with chronic attendance problems.

Participation is a subjective measure of the effectiveness of each student’s engagement with the material. Students’ participation grade is not measured crudely by how often a student speaks in class; rather, the quality of student’s contributions to class discussions will determine the participation component of overall grades. Consequently, talkative students who make minimal qualitative contributions will earn a mediocre participation grade; while students who speak rarely but make valuable contributions will be receive a high participation grade.

2. **Examinations (400 Points; 43%).** Four examinations will be administered over the course of the semester. Each examination will be worth 100 points, and will be comprised of fill-in-the-blank, concept identification, and discussion sections. The examinations will focus on concept identification and analysis of the central assumptions and theories of various political theorists. The instructor will provide study guides for each examination.

3. **Take-Home Essays (225 Points; 32%).** Students will be assigned four short essay topics over the course of the semester. Each topic will be randomly assigned to students, who will write a 5-7 page essay (roughly 1,200-1,700 words) analyzing the topic. Points will be earned in an escalating scale for each essay. The first will be worth 25 points, and second essays will be worth 50 points, the third essay will be worth 70 points, and the final essay will be worth 80 points.

“Man is born free, and yet everywhere lives in chains.”
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Extra Credit

Students who feel that they are under-performing in the course may seek to earn extra credit through the completion of additional assignments. Students may improve their standing in the class by 80 points, which corresponds to one (1) letter grade. Students must consult with the instructor prior to undertaking extra credit, and should be careful that their efforts to earn extra credit do not undermine their performance on other course requirements

“A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing.”

Oscar Wilde

Deadlines

“When you look into the abyss, the abyss looks into you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

Respecting deadlines is essential for both student and instructor. By meeting deadlines, students are better able to meet their course responsibilities, and are more likely to retain the information being conveyed through the class. Conversely, by submitting work on time students help the instructor fairly evaluate each student’s efforts.

Please honor the deadlines established by the instructor whenever possible, and promptly inform the instructor in the event that an assignment is to be submitted late.

Submitting Work and Late Assignments Policy

Students bear responsibility for informing the instructor if they cannot attend class or if they encounter difficulties in submitting work on time. Students should be able to present a documentable rationale for their late submission of work.

“Morality is not properly the doctrine of how we make ourselves happy, but how we make ourselves worthy of happiness.”

Immanuel Kant

Students may e-mail assignments if they cannot attend class when an assignment is due. Students should be aware that university computer protocols prevent faculty computers from opening e-mail attachments that are not formatted in Microsoft Word software. Excused work must be made up and submitted to the instructor by a date agreed to by the instructor. Uncompleted excused work will be assigned a '0' on the final week of the semester.

Grading Policy

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Karl Marx

This course is designed to challenge students to think seriously about the issues related to politics and government in the United States. The principal basis for students' grades is the quality of analysis and substantive knowledge as demonstrated through completed assignments and examinations. As a rule, students' grades are not comparative, and the instructor is philosophically opposed to curving.

Generally, students must perform at a consistently high level over the course of the semester to earn an 'A', which is reserved for genuinely excellent work. Conversely, students who are not particularly interested in the course (or their grade point average) can earn a 'C' with relative ease. The instructor is willing to work with any student who indicates a desire to learn, work hard, and who show respect for the academic process. Alternatively, the preponderance of students who fail this instructor's courses can be directly attributed to nonattendance and failure to submit out-of-class assignments. The instructor will *attempt* to intervene in the event that an individual student appears in jeopardy of failing the course, but students should recognize that academic performance is, ultimately, a matter of personal commitment.

Assignment	Points	Percentage
1. Attendance	75	.094
2. Participation	100	.125
3. Examination # 1	100	.125
4. Examination # 2	100	.125
5. Examination # 3	100	.125
6. Examination #4	100	.125
7. Short Essay #1	25	.031
8. Short Essay #2	50	.063
9. Short Essay #3	70	.087
10. Short Essay #4	80	.100
Total	800	1.00

Course Point Summary	
A	700-630
B	629-560
C	559-490
D	489-420
F	>419

Grade Descriptions	
In order to avoid misunderstanding, the following descriptions capture the instructor's view of each of the following grades.	
A	Consistently excellent performance that generally exceeds the instructor's expectations
B	Very good performance in most categories, with occasional lapses in performance that indicates room for minor improvements
C	Generally mediocre but overall acceptable performance, indicating little aptitude for or commitment to the subject matter and considerable room for improvement
D	Generally unacceptable performance that barely meets the standard for acceptable comprehension of the course material
F	Inadequate performance that indicates the student should retake the course or reconsider their academic aspirations.

Academic Misconduct Policy

All institutions of higher education rely on the honesty of all its members, including students, faculty, staff, and administration. Instructors especially require an honest effort from their students, and the failure to follow the guidelines described in the Student Handbook (especially Title 12) represents a basic threat to the integrity of the entire academic process. Students should remember that when they cheat they are primarily hurting themselves by denying themselves access to an important resource (e.g. information) for which they or their parents have paid.



Moreover, despite the fact that the biggest victim of academic dishonesty may be the perpetrator, fellow students are also victimized: such cheating undermines the legitimacy of the institution as well, which erodes public confidence that the university is actually providing the resource that is the basis for its existence.

“Out of timber so crooked as that from which human is made, nothing entirely straight can be built.”

Immanuel Kant

The central element of all academic misconduct is the intent to deceive. Seeking to persuade an instructor that a student knows something they do not know (e.g. cheating on an examination), or attempting to pass off the words or thoughts of another person as the student's

own (e.g. plagiarism) are the two most common examples of cheating, and should be avoided at all costs.

To avoid cheating, refer to the Student Handbook's section on academic dishonesty, and follow the guidelines for citing references carefully when writing research papers.

The instructor approaches each student in the belief that they are honest and want to *earn* an education. However, cheating is easily discerned among instructors with experience, and if confronted with clear evidence of academic misconduct, the instructor will notify the RSU Academic Integrity Committee for further investigation. Conviction of academic misconduct may result in the student receiving discipline ranging from 'learning experiences' all the way to failure in the course and potentially to expulsion from the university.

"Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to..."
Mark Twain

Please remember, honest people who work hard do not need to cheat!

Students With Disabilities

Americans with Disabilities Act

Rogers State University is committed to providing students with disabilities equal access to educational programs and services. Any student who has a disability that he or she believes will require some form of academic accommodation must inform the professor of such need during or immediately following the first class attended. **Before** any educational accommodation can be provided, it is the responsibility of each student to prove eligibility for assistance by registering for services through Student Affairs.

"A rising tide lifts all boats."
John F. Kennedy

Students needing more information about Student Disability Services should contact:

Misty Smith
Director of Student Development
Rogers State University
1701 W. Will Rogers Blvd.
Claremore, OK 74017
918-343-7579

Instructor's Teaching Philosophy

The instructor is committed to the Socratic Method, a question-oriented approach to teaching, because he believes that students learn best when they take an active role in learning the material. Class time is not viewed by the instructor as an extension of mandatory educational experiences like high school, where students are often spoon-fed the course material; instead, class time is viewed as a time for questions and discussion of the material that challenge students' understanding of politics and how it relates to them.



"Philosophers are adults who persist in asking childish questions."

Isaiah Berlin

Students are expected to come to class having read the material and to be prepared to discuss prepared to offer substantive and effective commentary on the assigned readings. Unprepared students will probably not get much from the class, and may find themselves

singled out for questioning from the instructor. The purpose of such questioning is not to embarrass the student – although that will often be a logical by-product of being asked questions for which one is unprepared to answer! Rather, the idea behind the questioning is to challenge students to take their studies seriously, and to recognize a simple fact: whether or not you are interested in politics, politics is interested in you!

About the Instructor



Kenneth S. Hicks received his Doctor of Philosophy in political theory from the Department of Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina. His doctoral training focused on contemporary political theory, especially on the challenges related to sustaining communities in multicultural societies with a strong emphasis on individual rights. Dr. Hicks is currently head of the Department of History and Political Science

Dr. Hicks has broad interests both within and outside the discipline of political science. He offers many of the upper division courses in political science, including international relations, comparative politics, democratic theory, media and politics, American foreign policy, and classical political theory. Additionally, Dr. Hicks teaches several of the core courses in Social and Behavioral Science, including Perspectives on Human Behavior, Methods of the Social Sciences, and the senior Capstone seminar.

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

Henry David Thoreau

Dr. Hicks lives in Claremore, and is married to Kelly Hicks, who is Assistant Coordinator of Financial Aid at RSU.

Tentative Course Schedule

“Nothing happens to anybody which he is not fitted by nature to bear.”

Marcus Aurelius

The course schedule is tentative, and the instructor reserves the right to make changes when deemed necessary. Generally, the instructor’s tendency is to make accommodations in granting students’

additional time to complete reading and writing assignments. Dates for examination and due dates for papers will not be moved forward. The schedule will also be posted on the instructor’s website. Students should use the blank schedule below to note changes in the reading assignments. Students should bear in mind that the instructor cannot exhaustively cover all of the material in the text, and so should take the time to carefully read the material, in order to better discern which material requires additional classroom explanation and instruction.

Students are advised to attempt to read the required texts in their entirety as early as possible

“Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein