

Politics 3534F: Contemporary Political Theory

Fall 2022

Tuesday 2:30-4

SSC-2020

Instructor: E. Finneron-Burns (efinnero@uwo.ca)

Office: SSC 7211

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30 or by appointment

Course Outline

This course applies foundational concepts in political theory (e.g., freedom, equality, justice, rights) to a variety of contemporary social issues. In the first class we will agree on a list of topics to cover, so please consider the options (below) in advance and come prepared with your preferences.

The focus will be on developing an understanding of how to develop your own views of these matters: what do *you* think and, more importantly *why*? The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and by your fellow students. Each week the two readings will provide differing views on the same question. Your job shall be to reflect on and evaluate the persuasiveness of the arguments in each. In each seminar we will discuss the merits and demerits of each article as well as comment on the topic at large. Your essays and exam will require you to be able to argue persuasively, taking due consideration of others' arguments.

Assessment

Participation: 10%

Presentation: 15%

Term Paper: 40%

Take Home Exam:35%

Term Paper (40%):

2500 words due on a topic of your choice, related to the course content. I strongly advise you to come see me or email me to discuss your idea. This is for your benefit—to ensure your topic is relevant and focused enough to be successfully done within the confines of the word limit. The essays are research projects, meaning that you are expected to read beyond the scope of the syllabus (at least 5 external academic sources). Essays should be submitted electronically through OWL.

You may submit your essay any point after October 25 but before December 6 (last day of classes).

Some hard deadlines:

November 15: If you want the opportunity to revise and resubmit your essay in accordance with my feedback. Revised essay is subject to the deadlines below. The highest of the two marks will count.

November 30: If you want to know your essay mark before you submit the take home exam.

December 6: No essays will be accepted beyond this date.

Presentation (15%):

Each week one group of students (size of groups will depend on class enrolment) will present on the readings for that week. Presentations should include (i) a summary of the readings; (ii) any critical notes (positive and negative) you have about the readings; (iii) a list of questions for the class about the readings and the ideas that they raise. The group presenting will then lead the class discussion (with my help). Marks will be awarded to the group as a whole, but you are able to discuss any inequities with me confidentially.

Participation (10%):

Participation is assessed primarily on the quality of your contributions, but you will not do well if you attend only a few classes even if your contributions in those classes are very good. Similarly, if you simply attend every class without contributing, you will find your participation mark disappointing. Participation marks can be earned through critiquing the readings, asking questions or requesting clarification of things you did not understand (there are no stupid questions!), responding to classmates' points, participating in in-class debates or small group discussions, among others. If you are struggling with active participation in class due to shyness, imposter syndrome, or anything else, please do email me or come to see me in my office hours to discuss options.

Take Home Exam (35%)

Details TBD

Plagiarism

If you are caught cheating/plagiarising, you will receive a mark of 0 on that assignment.

How to Do Well

The emphasis throughout is on the critical evaluation of arguments. How are important political positions supported? In our weekly discussions we will examine the arguments put forward in the readings and consider whether or not they are persuasive. Generally, the two readings for the week put forward conflicting views, thus inviting us to make evaluations about which has the better argument. (It is taken for granted that we may not all reach the same conclusion.)

Late Submission of Work

Late essays will incur a penalty of 5% per day and will not be accepted after one week. In extenuating circumstances, extensions may be granted, but only if arranged in advance of the due date.

Email Etiquette

I will do my best to respond to emails received Monday-Friday 9am-5pm within 24 hours. Occasionally there will be delays in replies but if you do not hear back from me within 48 hours (Monday-Friday), please do resend your email as it might have been missed (professors receive a lot of emails!). Note that I rarely work on evenings, weekends, or holidays, so emails sent at those times will take longer to receive a reply. Before you fire off an email at 2am, check and double check this syllabus to see if your question is answered here. Please also include POL3334 in the subject line so I know to which course you are referring.

Electronic Devices

There is a vast array of research demonstrating that the use of electronic devices not only does not aid learning, but actually hinders it. Research suggests that information taken down

on laptops is not retained as well as handwritten notes. Laptops may of course present a variety of social media and internet distractions to the user and those within eyesight. Furthermore, the class is run as a discussion seminar, and laptop use creates a 'wall' of screens that is not conducive to active discussion. With this in mind, laptops are not banned, but I encourage you to think seriously about whether you really need to use it during a discussion-based class such as this. It goes without saying that if you do choose to use your laptop/tablet, you should not use it for non-class related activities. Students found to be using technology for non-academic purposes may be asked to leave class. Cell phones must be put on silent (not vibrate) and placed out of view for the duration of class.

Inclusivity

The course tackles topics that may be controversial and personal to some students. Members of this class are from a variety of different academic backgrounds, races, religions, etc., so whilst robust debate is encouraged, it must be done respectfully. If there are circumstances that might affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss strategies to accommodate your needs. This includes discussing whether some topics on the syllabus are particularly sensitive for you.

Readings:

Once we have selected the topics, I will post the reading schedule and links to readings on OWL. There is no textbook for this course.

Important Dates

September 13 – No Class

September 20 – Introduction to the course, topic selection, and group allocations

September 27 – Topic #1

October 4 – Topic #2

October 11 – Topic #3

October 18 – Topic #4

October 25 – Topic #5

November 1 – No class, Reading Week

November 8 – Topic #6

November 15 – Topic #7

November 22 – Topic #8 – Class will be on Zoom

November 29 – No Class

The take home exam will be posted on November 29 by 9am. It will be due December 6 at 2:30pm

Topic Choices

1. What's wrong with gentrification?
2. Is there a right to housing? If so, what kind?
3. Who should pay for climate change?
4. Should parents be licensed?
5. Do parents have the right to raise their children in a particular religion/culture?
6. Does justice extend into the family?
7. Is there a duty to work?
8. Is there anything wrong with discrimination (good or bad) because of looks?
9. Do animals have rights?
10. Should children have the right to vote?
11. Is affirmative action ok?
12. Should states have the right to limit immigration?
13. On what grounds may states select immigrants?
14. When, if ever, should minorities be granted exemptions from the law?

Official Stuff

Assessments worth 10% or less of the overall course grade: Please contact me to discuss accommodations you may require.

Assessments worth 10% or more of the overall course grade: University policy requires that academic consideration for work totalling 10% or more of the final course grade can only be granted by academic counselling in your home faculty. You must provide valid medical or supporting documentation to the Academic Counselling Office of your Faculty of Registration as soon as possible. For further information, please consult the University's medical illness policy at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

The Student Medical Certificate is available at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Accessible Education, which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities can be found at:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Accommodation_disabilities.pdf.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently

submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).An