

POLS 2300: Introduction to Political Theory

Spring 2021



Instructor: Zachary J. Stickney

Email: zacharystickney@weber.edu (messages on Canvas are my preferred method of communication for this course, but feel free to use this email as needed)

Office: Virtual

Office Hours: By Appointment - Please message me on Canvas

Zachary J. Stickney is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Utah. Prior to his teaching career, Zach has served as a Public Health Volunteer with the United States Peace Corps in Namibia, was the Associate Producer for the Emmy-nominated PBS Independent Lens documentary Dogtown Redemption, and assisted United for Iran with the IranCubator – a civic tech incubator to promote social good in Iran. These projects inform much of Zach's current studies, which are primarily focused on the role of emerging technologies in politics.

Note: This syllabus is meant to serve as an outline and guide for our course. Please note that I may modify it with reasonable notice to you. I may also modify the Course Schedule to accommodate the needs of our class. Any changes will be posted on Canvas under Announcements.

Course Description

Course Summary

What is government for, and why do governments exist in the first place? Who consents to the rule of the government and how? How do governments retain their power, and what powers do they have? What does it mean to be free? What makes a just society? What is my responsibility to society, and vice-versa?

These questions, and many others like them, animate the intellectual tradition of political theory – the study of fundamental questions surrounding the order of human society and the collective human experience. In this course, we will survey a glimpse of the traditions of political theory in the western context from early Greek political thought, the enlightenment and its “modern” political theory, and into the contemporary era and its ongoing debates and controversies. Throughout, we will develop an understanding of why the questions explored in this tradition remain vitally important today.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Develop an understanding of political theory as an intellectual tradition;

- Develop and improve skills in textual analysis and critical thinking;
- Develop and improve their ability to compare, examine, and assess theoretical arguments as democratic citizens;
- Demonstrate an ability to articulate and defend their own interpretation of political arguments.

Required Materials

As a first-generation college student, I think the college experience is expensive enough without me adding to it without necessity. Therefore, the materials for this course are either available for free online, or will be provided freely by me in weekly PDF documents or other files. I encourage you to either print these materials for your own use, or integrate them into an app of your choice (I recommend Evernote) so that you may annotate the files at your discretion. I may also recommend optional, supplemental reading which you are welcome to purchase or check-out from the library if you are interested.

If for any reason this arrangement is problematic for you, please contact me through Canvas and we will work to make arrangements that fit your needs.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Online learning environments present unique challenges and opportunities for student learning. One of the deepest challenges is that of interactivity and the development of classroom culture. Without a physical learning space, it can be difficult to interact with other students or have a meaningful relationship with your instructor. This is part of the reasoning behind your weekly participation survey assignments – the aim of these is to help me to better understand your progress in the course and therefore create a space to develop a purposive learning relationship. Likewise, weekly discussion boards will be available in order to help you ask questions, share resources, and develop a learning relationship with other students.

It should be noted that the development of this kind of space, whether in an online or physical environment, is not solely the responsibility of the instructor alone. I pledge to do my best to create this kind of environment, and I deeply encourage you to work with me to make this environment possible. I strongly believe that intentional and regular communication will make your experience in this course much more positive.

In addition, I am a proponent of **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** strategies. In brief, SEL contends that any learning environment is incomplete and ultimately ineffective if it doesn't take deep consideration of the social and emotional factors impacting the course. These may include things like a student's relationship with classmates or the instructor, the mental health of the student, and other factors. As such, I will do my best to make this online learning environment a healthy one for you, and I will work to be open and receptive to your communication – especially communication regarding any external factors which may impact your course experience. Mental health is an especially deep concern for me, and I encourage you to reach out to me if there's anything I can do to accommodate whatever challenges you may be facing. If I am unable to assist you, I will do my best to serve as an advocate on your behalf to help you acquire whatever assistance you may need.

Instructor Expectations

Your instructor is committed to the following expectations for this course:

- The instructor will do his best to create a learning environment which is collegial, welcoming, and conducive to student learning and communication;
- The instructor will work with students in order to help develop an effective online collaboration environment;
- The instructor will communicate regularly with students via class discussions, office hours, emails, Canvas, feedback on assignments, and other methods;
- The instructor will provide feedback on assignments in a timely manner.

Student Expectations

The following is expected of all students in this class:

- Students will do their best to check in regularly to Canvas in order to receive course announcements or other module updates in a timely manner;
- Students will work to develop an effective online collaboration environment;
- Students will do their best to create a learning environment which is collegial, welcoming, and conducive to student learning and communication.

Course Engagement and Participation

Class participation is an essential part of the learning process. Students are responsible for their learning and are required to actively participate in all components of the course. Effective learning in an online environment presents additional unique challenges, so students must develop habits for regular course check-ins in order to learn effectively. Since this course also features collaborative elements, students must also make an effort to communicate effectively in an online environment. Last, open and critical discussion and communication associated with the course material is welcomed and encouraged at all times.

Evaluation & Grading

In total, there will be **100 points** awarded through your assignments and quizzes this semester (see the course schedule below for assignment due dates).

The breakdown for these points is as follows:

Weekly Survey Participation (20%): Each week of the course, there will be a weekly participation survey on Canvas, geared toward helping me assess your understanding of the material. These are worth 2 points each for a total of 20 points, and are graded entirely on timely participation.

Short Answer Quizzes (20%): Through the semester, we will have 4 short answer quizzes worth 5 points each, which will be announced on surprise dates on Canvas. Quiz topics will cover items discussed the week the quiz is announced.

More information will be posted online in advance of the first quiz.

Political Theory Meme (20%): It wouldn't be a class taught by a millennial without some kind of meme assignment! For this assignment, you will create an original meme touching on some of the content learned in the course. Additional instructions will be given out during **Week 4**.

Midterm Paper (20%): This paper will be 800-1000 words. For the midterm, we will imagine a future, post-apocalyptic society in which you have been tasked to help create a new form of government. Using sources explored up to the midterm in class, you will outline some of the key questions and challenges your new government hopes to address, and how your new government will retain its legitimacy. A full guide and rubric will be released during **Week 5**.

Final Paper (20%): The final paper will be 1200-1500 words and may cover the topic of your choice related to the course content. Essays will be graded based on the clarity of your arguments, your use of textual evidence from the course to support your argument, the depth of your analysis, and your use of grammar, syntax, and spelling. A full guide and rubric will be released after the midterm.

Please see Canvas for additional assignment details.

The Grading Scheme for the Course is as follows:

A 100%-94%	A- 93.9%-90%	
B+ 89.9%-87%	B 86.9%-84%	B- 83.9%-80%
C+ 79.9% - 77%	C 76.9%-74%	C- 73.9%-70%
D+ 69.9%-67%	D 66.9%-64%	D- 63.9%-60%
E 59.9%-0%		

A Note On Extra Credit:

Generally speaking, I don't offer extra credit in my courses outright. That being said, at times there are events or other opportunities on Campus which are related to the course which occasionally merit an exception to this rule. In those cases, I will alert the entire class to such opportunities via Canvas.

Course Schedule

The below course schedule details some of the major course readings, assignment due dates, and other content you should be aware of. Please note that there will also be video lectures and other content shared during each weekly module.

Generally speaking, readings will be assigned **one week before** they will be discussed in class. For instance, your **Week 2** readings will be shared on Canvas during the first week of class. **You should complete the readings before the weekly discussions, so you can ask clarifying questions and contribute to class discussions.**

To see the full content for each week, please view the selected weekly module on Canvas.

Week 1: What is Political Theory? (January 12 and 14)

- Readings:
 - Course syllabus
 - Can you make AI fairer than a judge? *MIT Technology Review*
<https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/10/17/75285/ai-fairer-than-judge-criminal-risk-assessment-algorithm/>
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 1 Participation Survey due **Friday, January 15th.**
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Week 2: Early Democratic Thought: The Political Theory of Greece (January 19 and 21)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Aristotle's *Politics: Book 4* (350 B.C.E)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 2 Participation Survey due **Friday, January 22nd.**
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Week 3: Consent and Legitimacy of Government (January 26 and 28)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651)
 - Selections from John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* (1689)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 3 Participation Survey due **Friday, January 29th.**
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Week 4: Consent and Legitimacy of Government II (February 2 and 4)

- Readings:
 - Selections from John Stewart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859)
- **Assignments:**
 - Week 4 Participation Survey due **Friday, February 5th.**
 - Political theory meme assignment instructions shared this week. Assignment is due by **Friday, April 2nd.**

Week 5: Consent, Legitimacy, Civility: On Being a Democratic Citizen (February 9 and 11)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Teresa Bejan's *Mere Civility* (2017)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 5 Participation Survey due **Friday, February 12th.**
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Week 6: Freedom and Inequality (February 16 and 18)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1755)
 - Selections from Marx and Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 6 Participation Survey due **Friday, February 19th.**
 - **Midterm Essay Requirements Distributed: Due Friday, March 5th.**
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Week 7: What is a Just Society? (February 23 and 25)

- Readings:
 - "First Words" – Selections from Taiaiake Alfred's *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2009)
 - "Collective Responsibility" – Hannah Arendt (1968)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 7 Participation Survey due **Friday, February 26th.**
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Week 8: What is a Just Society? II (March 2 and 4) MIDTERM WEEK

- Readings:
 - Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)
 - Kimberle Crenshaw, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait" (2015)
 - **Assignments:**
 - **Midterm Essay Due – Friday, March 5th by 10:00pm.**
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Week 9: NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK MARCH 8-12

Week 10: Freedom, Domination, and the American Experiment I (March 16 and 18)

- Readings:
 - Declaration of Independence (1776)
 - Selections from the United States Constitution (1787)
 - "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" – Frederick Douglass (1852)
- **Assignments:**

- Week 10 Participation Survey due **Friday, March 19th.**
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Week 11: Freedom, Domination, and the American Experiment II (March 23 and 25)

- Readings:
 - “Address at the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, IL” (1838) – Abraham Lincoln
 - “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” – Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 11 Participation Survey due **Friday, March 26th.**
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Week 12: Delivering the Promise of Liberty: Building a Multiracial Society (March 30 and April 1)

- Readings:
 - Selections from James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963)
 - Selections from Safiya Noble’s *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 12 Participation Survey due **Friday, April 2nd.**
 - **April 2nd is the last day to turn in your political theory meme assignment for full credit.**
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Week 13: Contemporary Political Theory: The Politics of Sight and the Banality of Evil (April 6 and 8)

- Readings:
 - Selections from Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 13 Participation Survey due **Friday, April 9th.**
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Week 14: Frontiers of Political Theory: Technology and Democracy (April 13 and 15)

- Readings:
 - Ch. 1: *The Ethics of Invention* by Sheila Jasanoff (2016)
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 14 Participation Survey due **Friday, April 16th.**
 - **If you would like feedback on your final before turning it in officially, April 16th is the last day to send it to me. I will provide feedback by April 20th.**
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Week 15: Wrap-Up Week (April 20 and 22)

- April 20: Course Wrap-up discussion
 - April 22: **Writing Day - No Class**
 - **Assignments:**
 - Week 15 Participation Survey due **Friday, April 23rd.**
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Week 16: Finals (April 27)

- Final paper due **Tuesday, April 27 by 10:00pm.**

Course Policies

Canvas

Since this is an online course, we will be using Canvas to submit assignments, make class announcements, and so on. If you are having any trouble with Canvas as it relates to this class, contact me first and we will see if we can resolve the issue. If the problem persists, contact Canvas Support 24/7 by clicking the Help button located on the left-side global navigation.

Communication

If you need to speak to me about grades, course questions, or other concerns, contacting me via Canvas is the best way to reach me. In general, I try to respond within 24 hours, but this may be extended if you contact me during weekends or work-related travel. In such instances I will respond as soon as possible.

Late Assignments

Assignment due dates are posted on Canvas and, in general, late assignments will not be accepted. That said, I know life happens, and in extenuating circumstances arrangements may be made provided students contact the instructor **before** the assignment due date. Students should make every effort to turn assignments in on time.

Institutional Policies & Procedures

A Note on Zoom-facilitated courses:

Your course this semester will include synchronous (meaning that we will meet together, online, at our regularly scheduled class time) online class sessions. You can enhance your success in these synchronous sessions by following the guidelines below:

1. Students will be required to use Zoom for both office hours and synchronous class sessions. A webcam and mic are required to participate effectively in web conferencing sessions.
2. Access to video conferencing will be provided via a link in a course announcement as well as on the course homepage.
3. If you are new to Zoom, find easy set up and [access information here](#).
4. Copy and paste the URL (or click on the web link) provided by your instructor at the time specified for the meeting. Launch the app (after initially downloading, installing, and logging in), and you will enter the meeting immediately.
5. You may choose to use your mobile device.
6. Please take note of the following:

- a. Make every effort to be logged in to the class session 5 minutes early so we can start on time.
 - b. Mute your microphone at all times unless you are speaking.
 - c. When participating in a web conference, it is beneficial for our learning community to see you. Please have your camera on during the event. When presenting or speaking to the class during a web conference, students are highly encouraged to activate their webcam so others receive the full message, including non-verbals. NOTE: If you are unable to or wish not to use the video feature, please contact me and we can discuss options.
 - d. Demonstrate etiquette for online engagement (i.e. pause between speakers so as not to interrupt, use the hand-raising icon or message box to speak, please dress as if you were coming to a face to face class).
 - e. If you need to take a break, please turn off your video and mute yourself. Do not take your device.
 - f. Be engaged! This should be an enjoyable experience
7. I would like you to use a webcam in my class because I want to:
 - a. know who is in my Zoom lecture for security;
 - b. get to know my students, especially during these uncertain times;
 - c. do breakout rooms on Zoom and help you get to know the people in your group and feel comfortable with them;
 - d. go around to the breakout room and check in with you. By seeing your name and face, I can see your screen sharing and assess your engagement more effectively.
 8. For your security, I request that you use your first name and last initial only on your Zoom profile.

ADA Accommodations:

Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Disability Services (DS) in room 181 of the Student Services Center or Room 256 at the Davis Campus. Disability Services can also arrange to provide course materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats upon request.

Statement on Plagiarism:

The WSU Student Code defines plagiarism as 'the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person or group's ideas or work' (Section 6-22, part IV, subsection D, 2, b). Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsification, accessing unauthorized course or test information, using unauthorized resources, or breaches of copyright laws. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The penalty for academic dishonesty in this course is failure on the assignment and possibly the course, depending on circumstances.

Statement on Inclusivity:

Pivotal to Weber State University's mission is the need to embrace and value the diversity of its members. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual, we seek to cultivate an environment that encourages freedom of expression. Because the University is a community where inquiry is nurtured and theories are tested, every individual has the right to feel safe to express ideas that differ from those held by other members of the community. However, all persons who aspire to be part of our campus community must accept the responsibility to

demonstrate civility and respect for the dignity of others. Recognizing that the proper balance between freedom of expression and respect for others is not always apparent or easy to achieve, we must continually challenge ourselves and each other in an atmosphere of mutual concern, good will and respect. Therefore, expressions or actions that disparage an individual's or group's ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability are contrary to the mission of Weber State University.

Statement Concerning Core Beliefs:

According to the University's Policies and Procedures Manual (PPM 6-22 IV), students are to "[d]etermine before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.

Statement Concerning the Possibility of University Closure:

If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via Canvas, e-mail, or whatever form of communication is most conducive to our class structure.

Statement Concerning Mental Health:

If you are experiencing mental health or other wellbeing challenges through the semester, know you are not alone. You are welcome to contact me regarding any challenges you are facing if you feel I may be of assistance, even if you simply require an advocate to help you find or access resources. Your mental health is very important to me.

Weber State University also has a Counseling and Psychological Services center (<https://www.weber.edu/counselingcenter/>) where you can make a free appointment by calling 801-626-6406. **Weber State students are entitled to 12 free counseling sessions per year, in addition to group therapy sessions.** I deeply encourage you to use these resources as you need them. I've also listed resources for immediate assistance below:

Crisis Text Line: 741741

SAFE UT: 1-800-273-8255 (also has mobile applications available on iOS and Android)