

**Department:** Political Science

**CourseNo:** 106

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** Introduction to Political Theory

**Contact:** Jennifer Sterling-Folker, Associate Professor

**Content Area:** CA1-Arts and Humanities

**Catalog Copy:** "POLS106. Introduction to Political Theory. Either semester. Three credits. Major themes of political theory such as justice, obligation, and equality, and their relevance to contemporary political concerns."

Proposed NEW Cat Copy: None

**Course Information:** a. Briefly describe in 2-3 sentences the course, stating course goals and objectives: This course introduces students to some of history's most influential political theories, with the goal that students are able to effectively communicate about concepts such as justice, democracy, freedom, power, citizenship and equality. It gives students practice in reading and comprehending difficult texts, in understanding and analyzing arguments, and in developing their own beliefs about politics. Learning from these theories can also help students better understand today's political world, and thereby serve them in becoming better citizens and more complete human beings.

b. Describe the course requirements (Specify exam formats, nature and scope of weekly reading assignments, nature and scope of writing assignments, problem sets, etc.): Course reading requirements include a number of primary texts in political theory. The course generally requires a midterm, a final, and some combination of quizzes, a short paper, and/or a group project linking the political theories discussed in the course to today's political world. The course is taught in a lecture format with in-class discussion and activities as size permits.

c. List the major themes, issues, topics, etc. to be covered: The course focuses on several broad themes, as current today as throughout political history, among which include: Why should we obey government? What constitutes good political leadership? What is the best form for government to take? What does it mean to be a citizen? What does liberty mean, and who should have it? What is democracy, and to what extent is American democracy alive? Is Marxism dead? Major topics students address in the course include democracy, citizenship, liberty, justice, equality, and power.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** he course is designed to meet these goals in general education:

2. Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility: In the course of their studies in secondary education, and even many post-secondary programs of study, students are often not exposed to some of the major political ideas that have shaped and influenced our world throughout history. This course broadens students' education by exposing them to these ideas. Also, due to its location at the intersection of political science and philosophy, political theory is intrinsically interdisciplinary. Plato was a philosopher, Machiavelli considered himself as creating a science

of politics, and Marx relied heavily upon studies of history and economics; the ideas and thinkers to which students are exposed in this course have influenced humanity beyond the narrow confines of pure “political science.”

3. **Acquire critical judgment:** This course involves not just learning about important political theories but subjecting those theories to critical analysis. In class discussions, exams, writing assignments and/or group projects we ask students to critically analyze and evaluate the arguments and theories we have read.

4. **Acquire moral sensitivity:** By its very nature political theory addresses normative questions—those that ask us what our world ought to be. This course asks students to see the political from a variety of perspectives and asks them to think about these often-difficult normative questions. This awareness can help them acquire a greater sensitivity to moral questions, especially about justice and equality.

**CA1 Criteria:** 2. **Inquiries into philosophical and/or political theory:** The course explicitly introduces students to and engages them in a critical inquiry into political theory. They must read, analyze, discuss, demonstrate an understanding of, and write about a variety of important political theories from history.

**Role of Grad Students:** Every semester this course is taught by several regular faculty members in the department at Storrs, including Professors Hiskes and Morrell. Select graduate students who are concentrating in this field serve as Teaching Assistants (TAs), who either grade for a faculty member or, if advanced in their studies, teach their own sections. All political science TAs are required to attend the Teaching Institute's roundtables on pedagogy offered prior to the start of Fall semester. International students are additionally required to take teaching tests and to attend a three-day training session at the Institute. Every Fall the department sponsors a TA information session to offer advice and discuss potential problems they may encounter. The department offers roundtables on pedagogical issues