Smita A. Rahman smitarahman@depauw.edu

104 Asbury Hall Office Phone: 765-658-4830

Department of Political Science Cell Phone: 773-572-6163

Office Hours: Tues 10:30-12:30 and Wed 11:30-12:30 Skype: smita.a.rahman

**POLS 130: Elements of Political Theory**

Course Description

This course offers an introduction to and exploration of selected topics in the history of Political Theory. It covers a range of thinkers, from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment thinkers of Europe and closes on a contemporary note that asks us to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of our time. We will probe the resources and limits of texts by Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Arendt, and Foucault, reading them in chronological order with an eye toward changes in concerns and concepts across time.  We will watch two contemporary films, *Into the Wild* and *The Lives of Others* to explore the relationships between individuals and society and how they are marked by power. The course will involve the consideration of the most vital questions about politics: What kind of a subject of study is politics? What justifies the authority of government, and what legitimates the rule of some people over others? The writers we will read have varying responses to this question, suggesting that there may not be agreement about a “right” answer.  Some argue that the notion of a social contract is a fruitful way to think about the nature of political authority and obligation, while others contest this and argue for a more fluid conception that appreciates historical continuity. Other questions we may address include: What is freedom, and how is it related to equality? How does the relation between reason and passion impact our understanding of politics? What is the relationship between politics and culture?

# Course Rationale and Objectives

The fundamental rationale of the course is to bring past writings and concepts to bear on present realities. The thinkers we will read provide conceptual tools with which we can work to understand our own political experience(s) in order to help develop our own political perspectives and ideas. Moreover, the course aims to challenge ordinary understandings of politics by expanding our concept of what politics is and the ways in which politics surrounds us—namely, that politics consists of much more than what happens in City Hall or in State Houses or in Washington and that it involves the micropolitics of ideas and perceptions as much as the macropolitics of governance and legislation.

The course is designed to help you:

* Understand the foundations and functions of political institutions.
* Appreciate the complexity of political institutions and experience.
* Critically analyze philosophical texts and consider different interpretations and applications.
* Ask and confront challenging and difficult questions about politics and common life.
* Improve your ability to clearly express ideas and opinions about politics, both orally and in writing.

Course Requirements

*Attendance and Participation:* This course will require active participation and regular work. You are expected to come to class having done the reading assigned for that day. I will regularly refer to the text in my lectures and ask you questions based on it. Regular attendance is a must. Class participation is essential to this course. You should come to class prepared to actively discuss a range of topics based on the reading and to unpack its broader implications and put it in critical perspective.

*Assignments:* In order to facilitate class discussion, you will be asked to complete small assignments. These can take the form of short one-paragraph responses to a quote from the assigned reading, an in-class quiz, a group assignment or a resonance paragraph that asks you to connect the reading to some aspect of contemporary politics and culture.

*Exams:* The other requirements for this class include a midterm exam, an in-class open book essay and a take-home cumulative exam. The midterm will consist of short essays.

The in-class essay will be an open-book exam, where you will be required to write an essay on the social contract, using textual evidence and analysis. The essay will be approximately 2-4 pages in length and you will be allowed the use of your computer.

The last exam will be a take home exam that will be consist of essay questions that you will be required to respond to with detailed textual evidence and analysis.

Instructions for each of those exams will be provided and explained in detail in class prior to the date of the exam. In addition, a review session will be conducted in class prior to the final exam.

If you fail to take either one of the exams, the midterm, the in-class essay, or the take-home exam, you will not pass the course.

If you are permitted extra time during an exam because of a disability, you must inform me well in advance of the scheduled exam so alternative arrangements can be made for you.

If you need to reschedule an exam because of an athletic or university event or because of illness, you must submit documentary evidence for my consideration in advance of the scheduled exam.

If you miss an exam without prior notice you will not be allowed to make it up, except in rare cases, with detailed documentation from your doctor or DePauw Administration

Your grade for this course will be computed as follows:

Class Participation and Attendance 15%

Midterm Exam 25%

In Class Essay 20%

Take Home Exam 30%

Assignments 10%

Course Material:

The following book is required for purchase and is available in the DePauw University Bookstore.

* *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche* (Hackett)

Readings marked with an asterisk on the syllabus can be found on the Moodle page for this course. You should download and complete the readings in advance of the assigned date.

Office Hours and Accessibility:

My office hours are on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. On Tuesday, I am available in my office from 10:30-12:30. I am also available in my office from 11:30-12:30PM on Wednesdays. Feel free to drop by to talk about the class, discuss future interests or simply to continue a conversation! In addition to these regular weekly office hours, I am often available to meet on Fridays as well, but not every week. Send me an email to set up an appointment if you need to meet to on a day when I do not offer office hours. I am also available to meet via Skype (my Skype address is smita.a.rahman) and also available to talk on the phone (773-572-6163) if we cannot meet in person. I strongly prefer to have conversations in person so while I am happy to respond to texts and talk you on the phone or skype, please try to come by office hours first.

I also offer additional office hours before exams and will announce them in advance by email.

Academic Integrity:

Violations of DePauw University’s Academic Integrity Policy will be taken very seriously and punished accordingly. All violations will be reported officially and the student will fail the assignment for which they are charged with the violation.

The complete Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <http://www.depauw.edu/handbooks/academic/policies/integrity/>

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

August 29 Away for conference

September 3 Introduction

September 5 Film: Into the Wild

September 10 Film: Into the Wild

Man, Nature and Society—Into the Wild lecture and discussion

September 12 \*Aristotle, Politics (excerpt 1)

September 17 \*Aristotle, Politics (excerpt 1)

September 19 Machiavelli, Letter to Vettori, pp.6-8 AND

The Prince, pp. 9-32

September 26 Machiavelli, The Prince, pp. 32-53

October 1 Machiavelli, The Discourses, pp. 53-88

October 3 Midterm Review in Class

**October 8** **MIDTERM EXAM**

October 10 Hobbes, Leviathan, pp.117-136

**No Class, Religious Holiday, Eid ul Adha, October 15**

October 17 Hobbes, Leviathan, pp.152-199

**No Class, Fall Break, October 19-27**

October 29 Hobbes, Leviathan, , pp.208-217 and 228-240

October 31 Rousseau, On The Social Contract, pp.427-454

November 5 Rousseau, On The Social Contract, pp.482-487

**November 7 IN CLASS ESSAY**

November 12 Mill, On Liberty, pp.592-620

November 14 Mill, On Liberty, pp.620-651

November 19 \*Wollestonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,

pp. TBA

November 21 Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party

pp. 798-804

November 26 Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party,

pp. 804-809

**No Class, Thanksgiving, November 28**

December 3 Film: The Lives of Others

\*Arendt, Totalitarianism, (excerpt)

December 5 Film: The Lives of Others

Lecture and Discussion

December 10 \*Foucault, Discipline and Punish (excerpt)

December 12 \*Foucault, Discipline and Punish (excerpt)

Conclusion and Review

**TAKE HOME EXAM DUE BY EMAIL ONLY ON**

**Tuesday, DECEMBER 17TH BY 5 PM\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Late exams will be penalized by a third of a grade for every day that they are late**