

NOVA COLLEGE-WIDE COURSE CONTENT SUMMARY

PLS 200 – INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC THEORY (3 CR.)

Course Description

Presents concepts of politics using political theory. Emphasizes the core thinkers and themes of political theory, with focus on concepts of justice, power, rights, liberty, and citizenship, within the context of differing conceptions of the state. Apply political theory as a method of analysis for analyzing current political events and problems. The assignments in the course require college-level reading fluency and coherent communication through written reports. Lecture 3 hours per week.

General Course Purpose

Introduce students to the study of politics through the core ideas and thinkers of Western Political Thought. Students will focus on fundamental questions of politics and political thought, such as what is the purpose of government, and what is the relationship between the citizen and the state? Students will develop an understanding of how different thinkers understand fundamental concepts such as power, rights, freedom, and justice. Students will consider contemporary challenges to the core ideas of Western Political Thought, as well as consider the fundamental questions of Western Political Thought in the context of current political events.

Course Prerequisites/Corequisites

None.

Course Objectives

Upon completing the course, the student will be able to:

Civic Engagement

The ability to contribute to the civic life and well-being of local, national, and global communities as both a social responsibility and a life-long learning process.

- Consider the following as understood by various theorists and apply to a current political problem:
 - The role of government in securing the public good
 - The responsibility of the citizen in securing the public good.
- Propose a solution to a current political problem based upon principles of key theories covered in the course.

Critical Thinking

The ability to use information, ideas and arguments from relevant perspectives to make sense of complex issues and solve problems.

- Compare and contrast the core ideas of theorists within the Western Political canon to one another.
- Apply key themes of Western Political Thought to current political events and problems.

Written Communication

The ability to develop, convey, and exchange ideas in writing, as appropriate to a given context and audience.

- Compose an analytical essay evaluating current political events or problems in the context of key concepts within the Western Political canon.

Purpose of Government

- Explain the role of government in securing the public good in the context of various forms of government.
- Describe the distinction between the public good and private interest in the context of various forms of government.

Suggested Readings:

- All readings listed in the following units engage these concepts.

The Citizen and the State

- Compare different models of citizenship, both ancient and modern
- Consider the relationship between the citizen and the state in the context of justice, the law, rights, and freedom.

Suggested Readings:

- Plato, *The Apology* and *Crito*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

What is Power?

- Describe the distinction between personal power and state power, and the limits of both.
- Describe the relationship between social and political organizations and power.
- Explain how social and political organizations can be used to channel and constrain power.

Suggested Readings:

- Machievelli, *The Prince*
- Hobbes, *The Leviathan*

Rights and Liberty

- Identify concepts of individual rights and liberty within the context of Western political thought.
- Explain the role of representative government in securing individual rights and liberty.
- Consider the connection between consent and individual liberty.
- Consider the connection between diversity of thoughts and expression and individual liberty.

Suggested Readings:

- John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*
- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Theories of Justice

- Identify different concepts of justice within the context of Western political thought.
- Consider the relationship between justice and equality.
- Consider the relationship between justice and economic systems.
- Consider the relationship between justice and the law

Suggested Readings:

- Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*
- Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

Principles of Democracy

- Compare models of different democratic systems and their outcomes.
- Consider the rights of the majority versus the minority in democratic systems.

Suggested Readings:

- *The Federalist Papers* #10 and 51
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
- Bagehot, *The English Constitution*
- Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*

Liberalism and Its Critics

- Consider contemporary debate addressing the limits of traditional Western political thought in its treatment of gender, culture, and diversity.

Suggested Readings:

The debate is dynamic and ongoing; the work of the following theorists is representative of critical challenges to traditional Western Political Thought.

- Susan Moller Okin
- Martha Nussbaum
- Iris Marion Young
- Will Kymlicka
- Chandran Kukathas
- Bikhu Parakh
- Kwame Anthony Appiah

Major Topics to be Included

- Civic Engagement
- Critical Thinking
- Written Communication
- Purpose of Government
- The Citizen and the State
- What is Power?
- Rights and Liberty
- Theories of Justice
- Principles of Democracy
- Liberalism and Its Critics