

## **Introduction to Political Thinking Politics 180, Spring 2020 – SYLLABUS**

**Instructor:** Dr. Alena Wolfink

**Class:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:50pm, MI 10

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00-5:00pm or by appointment, MI 218

**Email:** [wolfinka@beloit.edu](mailto:wolfinka@beloit.edu)

**Teaching Assistants:** Zule Bahena ([bahenaz@beloit.edu](mailto:bahenaz@beloit.edu)) and Mezekerta Tesfay ([tesfaym@beloit.edu](mailto:tesfaym@beloit.edu))

This course examines some of the key concepts of political theory as a means of engaging our political thinking. It examines the meaning of concepts like citizenship, participation, and justice by thinking systematically about the varieties of political membership and political action. We will ask, “What role does political theory play in our everyday lives? How does justice as an abstract, universal category compare and contrast to justice as a particular relation to a specific community? How are they connected? Is membership a condition of, or an end goal of political action? Do our activities in politics compromise, compete with, or bolster our identities as family members, consumers, workers, and students? Who decides the practical answers to questions such as these, and what can and ought we do with disagreements about them? What is the role of theory in guiding these answers, decisions, and actions?” In this course, you will discuss and write about the meaning of political theoretical concepts like citizenship, action, participation, membership, justice, and complexity. We will draw on analysis of historical and present-day formations, events, and debates, works of political thought from Aristotle and Locke to Fanon and Rancière, and recent scholarly writings. We will do this to develop and articulate theoretical and practical perspectives on citizenship and political action. This class satisfies the Writing (W) and Textual Cultures and Analysis (5T) initiatives program requirements at Beloit. Thus a primary class activity is grappling with complex ideas, expressed in complex and sometimes difficult readings, through active listening, discussion, and writing.

### *Learning Objectives*

My objectives for student learning in this course include both knowledge and skills. By the end of the semester you will:

- Be familiar with the arguments and ideas presented in the readings, in lectures, and in classroom discussions.
- Understand some main theoretical debates in political theory and be familiar with examples from the political world to which the debates speak.
- Thoughtfully read complex texts and analyze arguments.
- Communicate your own ideas and arguments, verbally and in writing.

### *Requirements*

A 1-credit course at Beloit requires a minimum of 12 hours of work each week, averaged across the semester. I will expect you to attend all classes and to thoughtfully read all course materials. Your course grade will be based on the following:

1. **Attendance and participation** in class. Regular attendance (10%) and high-quality participation (10% small-group, 5% large-group) in class counts as **25%** of your course grade.

2. A short **presentation** on one of the readings. This presentation counts for **10%** of your grade.
3. A **short essay** (2-3 pages) due at 2:00 pm on February 18<sup>th</sup>. The short paper contributes **15%** of your course grade.
4. An **exam** given at 2:00pm on April 7<sup>th</sup>. The mid-term exam contributes **20%** of your course grade.
5. A **take-home final** due Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup> at 10:00pm, by email. The final exam will be essay-based, and contributes **30%** of your course grade.

The goal of the essay and exams is to promote your careful reading and articulation of your views of the course materials, and synthesis of these materials with other course activities. I will provide you with guidelines, requirements, and/or prompts for each essay/exam, in-class and on Moodle. I will evaluate your use of textual evidence and argumentation, your originality, and clear exposition. Improvement of these skills throughout the semester is also an important course objective. The goal of the take-home final exam is to gauge the breadth of your engagement with the material.

Extensions and incompletes are only for emergency cases. Do not take the course if you foresee any reason that you cannot meet a scheduled deadline or sit for the scheduled midterm exam. Contact me immediately – and in advance of any due dates – should urgent, unavoidable, and unforeseen circumstances interfere with your completion of the requirements.

### ***Readings***

The readings are the foundation of the course. Much of the reading is dense and difficult, and full of unfamiliar ideas. You must give sufficient time to actively **read and re-read** the materials slowly, carefully, and thoughtfully. You should plan to spend about eight hours a week reading and re-reading the course materials, and preparing for class discussion. If you have taken these steps and are still having difficulty with the reading, you should arrange to see me in office hours.

There are no books required for purchase in this class. All required readings are available on Moodle. Print the readings on paper: you need to bring them with you to class, and studies show that your ability to comprehend and engage written materials is greater on paper than on screens.

### ***Class Discussions***

Class discussion makes up a significant portion of your grade in this class. I will use these guidelines to rigorously evaluate your work in section:

**A:** Full attendance. Solid, consistent, outstanding contributions, active listener

**B:** Full attendance. Participated well most days with contributions and as an active listener; or someone who made solid contributions, but contributed too often or took over conversations

**C:** Full attendance but not much more- i.e. little to no participation, just showed up to class and breathed.

**D:** Did average work or less, or who was present/breathing but regularly came to class without the texts.

F: Not in attendance enough to judge participation

### ***Grading Guidelines for Written Work***

I take seriously the responsibility of grading your work, and will always strive to be fair and accurate in my evaluations. I will use the following standards for the evaluating written work in this course:

- A: Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. The essay should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An ‘A’ paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.
- B: Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The ‘B’ paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an ‘A’; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.
- C: Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The ‘C’ paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The essay may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The ‘C’ paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.
- D: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper.
- F: Failing work—for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

*Please Note:*

- Poor mechanics detract from your grades, but good mechanics by themselves do not make a good paper. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling problems won’t be ignored, since they affect the communication of thought—but thought is the most important.

### ***Accommodations and Tutoring***

If you have a disability and need accommodations, contact Learning Enrichment and Disability Services (LEADS) located on 2nd floor Pearsons (north side), 608-363-2572, [learning@beloit.edu](mailto:learning@beloit.edu), or through [olesena@beloit.edu](mailto:olesena@beloit.edu). For accommodations in my class, you are to bring me an Access Letter from the Director of LEADS and then we will discuss how to implement the accommodations. Contact that office promptly; accommodations are not retroactive.

**Free peer tutoring** is available for most classes. For a tutor, apply by going to your Portal, to the Student Life tab, and then apply using the Tutoring Forms (on left) and Request a Tutor. If you have any questions, contact LEADS. If you want support from an **Organizational Tutor**, they are available in the Library, Sundays through Thursdays, from 6-9 pm.

### *Some Classroom Practices and Policies*

- Your curiosity and participation are essential to your learning success in this course. Please feel free to raise your hand if you have a question—every question brings something of value to the class.
- Bring your readings to every single class.
- I have a strict **no internet** policy in my classrooms (phones, computers, etc). The evidence is conclusive that use of electronics in the classroom, even for note-taking, inhibits student focus and learning, both for the student using the device and for others nearby.
- Be on time. Do not leave midway through class except during break or in case of emergency.
- I may post additional materials to Moodle; please be familiar with everything that's there.
- It is imperative that you check your Beloit email account for class communications. I will always try to respond to your emails within 24-48 hours. However, *I do not respond to grade inquiries via email*—all specific questions about your grade in the course must be addressed in person.
- We have a campus Writing Center that is available to for support in writing and revising essays. I strongly encourage all students to use it at least once during the semester.
- Any form of academic dishonesty or plagiarism will be met with a failing grade and referral to the college for further discipline.

***Intro to Political Thinking***  
***Schedule of Classes and Readings***

**Jan 21 & 23: Introduction to the Course**

*hooks*, “Teaching to Transgress”

**Jan 28: Is Withdrawal Action? Responding to Injustice**

Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”  
Ellison, *Invisible Man*, “Prologue”

**Jan 30 & Feb 6: Liberalism**

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 8, 9

**Feb 11, 13, 18: Republican Justice**

Aristotle, *Politics*: Bk III, Chs 1-5; Bk I, Chs 1-7, 12, 13; Bk VII, Chs. 14, 15.

\*\*Short paper due at 2:00pm on Feb 18<sup>th</sup>\*\*

**Feb 25, 27: Problems of Inclusion**

Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

\*\*In-class presentations\*\*

**Mar 3, 5: Local Citizenship**

“Sim City, Wisconsin” *Future Perfect*  
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sim-city-wisconsin/id1438157174?i=1000441272152>

“Preface to 2018 Commencement and other college functions”  
“Preface to Theatre performances”  
[Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory](#) (Canada).  
[The Campus Mounds Sustainability and Advocacy Initiative](#) (CMSAI)

\*\*In-class presentations\*\*

**Mar 17: Participation**

Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation”

**Mar 19: Representation**

Williams, “Representative,” in *Keywords*

Pitkin, “Democracy and Representation: Uneasy Alliance,” in *Scandinavian Political Studies*

**Mar 24 & 26: Violence as Action?**

Fanon, “Concerning Violence” from *The Wretched of the Earth*

**Mar 31 & Apr 2: Insurrection**

“Weather Underground” (documentary – shown in class)

**Apr 7: In-Class Exam**

**Apr 14: Rights and Declarations**

“Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” (1789)

De Gouges, “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen” (1791)

“*Egalité* for All: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution” (55 minutes, shown in class and also available on YouTube)

**April 21, 23, 28, 30: Breaking Boundaries: What’s “Political” vs. “Politics as usual”**

Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 1-19, 21-25, 28-38

**May 5**

*Concluding Thoughts*

**\*\*Final exam due Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, at 10pm.\*\***