

Power, Politics, & Inequality

Political Science 106

Winter 2023 Online Course

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This course introduces concepts concerning the politics of power and inequality with a focus on US history. The U.S. Declaration of Independence makes claims about human equality and declares governments derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” These ideals were revolutionary when they first appeared, and they have inspired democratic reformers around the world ever since. We investigate how the practices of domination have been at odds with the principles of equality in the arc of the American experience which has been defined by the subordination or repression of people based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, immigration status, age, and other qualities of human life. These gaps between principles and practices raise several key questions: Is U.S. government of, by, and for the people? *Who* are ‘the people’? What is the relationship between power and the people? What is, and how does, power and inequality animate *American Exceptionalism*? These questions, among others, will help guide our consideration as we survey specific episodes of conflict, not as peripheral or partial but rather as central to the production of and in the United States.

Our exploration of these topics is sweeping and eclectic, true to 100 level liberal arts education. The course is a mixture of both theoretical considerations and empirically driven case studies. The course is divided into five modules, with each being approximately 2 weeks. Module one introduces theories of power and foundational concepts associated with the creation of the United States, such as liberalism, democracy, exceptionalism, and more. In module two examines the history of the prison-industrial complex, from slavery to the (new) Jim Crow, and other practices of (in)justice in American society. Module three dives into race, immigration, and borders that have (re)defined America overtime. Module four shifts gears and focuses on battles over education, work, and healthcare in the United States. The course concludes with a comprehensive look at how the concepts of identity, including sexuality, gender, race, in the context of both theoretical and historical struggles have defined the United States and American Exceptionalism.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course and its assignments will develop an understanding of the key institutions, ideas, and interests at work in American politics, and will gain knowledge about a variety of key substantive policy and issue areas. This course also is designed to help build important critical skills and tools, including the following:

- To gain a demonstrated working knowledge of several major policy and political issues that lie at the heart of U.S. political debates today.
- To develop a deeper understanding of the workings and impact of the American political system at the local, state, national, and international levels.
- To grasp and apply important political concepts and theories of constitutional democracy.
- To help you reason well through varied problems and issues, whether in the classroom or in your personal and professional life. As Paul and Elder note, critical thinking “involves three interwoven phrases: It analyzes thinking, it evaluates thinking, and it improves thinking.” The work you do in and for this class is designed to enhance your critical thinking skills and tools, whether you are engaged in discussions or debates, presentations, or writing. That is, I hope to encourage all participants to ask good questions that reach past the allure of easy answers.
- Work with peers to improve writing skills and develop your writing process.
- Learn how to link course readings with your experiences of the social world.
- Learn how to engage your body and intuition in the process of thinking.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: To excel in this course (and any course), you need to attend class regularly, come prepared to discuss the readings, and hand assignments in on time. However, this is an asynchronous course with no required attendance. As such, students are expected

to participate in discussion posts which will account for this aspect of the grading and have only a week to complete.

Material Expectations: Because the costs of higher education are already steep, you will be happy to learn that all the assigned readings, podcasts, and videos for this class are available on Canvas or online more generally. The materials assigned for each class session can be found on canvas in the modules section.

Time Commitments: Students should typically expect to spend 1-3 hours doing “homework” for every 1 hour of class time in any given class. On average this means any given class would take up 6-9 hours of your time per week. Although, please note that weeks have some variation in difficulty and length of materials.

Late Assignments: There will be explicit due dates in Canvas for all assignments to keep you on track. If you find yourself getting behind please be in touch with your assigned GE, as they will use their own discretion in applying penalties for tardy submissions.

Academic Integrity: If there is clear and convincing evidence that a student engaged in dishonest academic behavior, the instructor will have the authority to take appropriate actions. You should be aware that dishonest behavior includes both “giving” and “taking” of improper assistance on exams, papers, or any other form of attempting to take credit for work that is not your own.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR GRADED EVALUATION

Discussion Board Participation: Discussion threads are a crucial element of this course. We learn best when there is an opportunity to read, process, talk about, and reflect further on ideas—especially when they are difficult. The questions will tend to have students consider both theoretical and empirical tensions with different concepts which will be beneficial to the concept paper assignment. These discussion threads on the Canvas forum will provide a helpful setting to raise questions you may have about lectures, reading, and other materials on Canvas. This is worth 10% of your total grade.

Weekly Reading Quiz: Students will complete weekly reading quizzes that test and enable practicing of skills such as comprehension, vocabulary, evaluation, logic, and argumentation. Moreover, students will be tested on specific content material from the readings and other materials on Canvas. To meet all accommodations, there is no time limit on any exam, but you will have only one attempt. grade. Each quiz is worth 5% of your grade, and there are 9 total quizzes.

Final Exam: Students will complete a comprehensive final exam which requires students to draw on materials and concepts learned throughout the course. There is no time limit, but you have only one attempt. This is worth 25% of final grade.

- **Calculating the Grade:** Your final grade will be based on the following components:

Discussion Participation	30%
Weekly Reading Quiz (5%/ea)	40%
Final Exam	30%
Total	100%

COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE

Module 1: Theories of Power and the foundations of American Exceptionalism

In this module students will review the syllabus and become familiar with the structure, limits, and expectations of this class. We then make our initial foray into foundational concepts and practices that shaped the colonial period and laid the foundations for centuries of struggles to come and impact our daily lives still today.

Week 1 (1/9 – 1/15)

Watch: See Canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Syllabus Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Steven Lukes, *Three Faces of Power*

Michel Foucault, *Disciplinary power*

Kimberle Crenshaw, *Intersectionality*

Allan G. Johnson. *Privilege, Power, and Difference*

Week 2 (1/16 – 1/22)

Watch: See Canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Rogan Kersh and James Morone, "The Ideas that Shape America," *By the People* (Oxford, 2012).

Bruce Miroff et al, "The Revolution and the Constitution: The Origins of the Democratic Debate," in *The Democratic Debate: American Politics in the Age of Change* (Wadsworth, 2010), pp.13-33.

Trymaine Lee, "A Vast Wealth Gap...," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2019.

Matthew Desmond, "American Capitalism is Brutal," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2019.

Module 2: Police, Military, and Alternatives?

In this module students discover the history of policing in America and how it has evolved overtime from incoherent drunkards into a massive and heavily militarized "prison-industrial complex" which affects nearly every aspect of our daily lives. What if any alternatives are there, with what cost?

Week 3 (1/23 – 1/29)

Watch: See Canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Gary Potter, "The History of Policing in the United States"

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

McElrath, W. & Turberville, S. (2020). *Poisoning Our Police: How the Militarization Mindset Threatens Constitutional Rights and Public Safety*

Week 4 (1/30 – 2/5)

Watch: See Canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Keeanga Yamhatta-Taylor, "We Should Still Defund the Police," *The New Yorker*, August 14, 2020

Washington, John. What is prison abolition? *The Nation*. July 31, 2018

Danielle Sered. (2018) *Accounting for Violence*

Imarisha, et al. *The Fictions and Futures of Transformative Justice*

Module 3: Race, Immigration, and Borders

Nation building, which is at the heart of *American Exceptionalism*, is centrally concerned with the politics of immigration and borders, which are in-turn typically policed by categories of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and economic potential. Simply put, there is a direct connection between borders, democracy, and power. In this module we aim to explore aspects of those dynamics from the earliest days of frontier expansion that defined our individual states and nation as a whole and leave their mark today.

Week 5 (2/6 – 2/12)

Watch: See Canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Olson, J. (2004). *The abolition of white democracy*. Minneapolis, Min. London: University of Minnesota Press. (e-book available through UO library). Read chapter 1 *A political theory of race*.

Walia, H., Estes, Nick, & Kelley, Robin D. G. (2021). *Border and rule : Global migration, capitalism, and the rise of racist nationalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Adam Goodman. (2020). *The Deportation Machine*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tichenor, Daniel. (2016) *Barriers to Immigration Reform*. *The Atlantic*.

Week 6 (2/13 – 2/19)

Watch: See canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Alana Semuels, *the Racist History of Portland*

Matt Novak, *Oregon Was Founded as a Racist Utopia*

Nixon, Rob (2011). *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press. Read 1-22 and 40-45

Barclay, E. & Frostenson, S. (2019). The ecological disaster that is Trump's border wall: a visual guide.

Module 4: Education, Healthcare, and Work

This module brings to the fore of our attention the various struggles over rights and access to education, healthcare, and work in America. These concepts are implicated in the broader struggles already covered concerning identity, policing, and nation building. Moreover, these issues will continue to be central to the future of national development.

Week 7 (2/20 – 2/26)

Watch: See canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Greenhouse, Stephen, *The Big Squeeze*, excerpts

Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*," (The New Press, 2016), 3-23, 135-51.

Geoffrey Stone, 'How a 1973 Supreme Court Decision Has Contributed to Our Inequality,'" *Daily Beast*, July 12, 2017.

Hess, Abigail. "How student debt became a 1.6 trillion dollar crisis"

Week 8 (2/27 – 3/5)

Watch: See canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Robert Divine et al, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal," *The American Story* (Pearson/Longman, 2005), 647-71.

Abigail Abrams, "The Surprising Origins of 'Medicare for All,'" *Time*, May 30, 2019.

Atul Gawande, "Is Health Care a Right?" *The New Yorker*, October 2, 2017.

Wallis, Claudia (2020). "Why Racism, Not Race, Is a Risk Factor for Dying of Covid-19"

Module 5: Gender, Sexuality, Reproduction

In this concluding module the class explores a history of oppression through the lens of gender, sexuality, and reproductive politics. Such political struggles are at the very heart of American democracy and persist to this day.

Week 9 (3/6 – 3/12)

Watch: See canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Beard, M. (2017). *Women & power : A manifesto*. New York, N.Y. ; London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company. **Pages 49-91.**

Susan Schulten, "The Crooked Path to Women's Suffrage," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2019.

Alison (2015) Gash, "Why Transgender Students Need 'Safe' Bathrooms," *The Conversation*,

Geoghegan, T. (2019). *Stonewall: A riot that changed millions of lives.*

Connell, R. (1995). *The Social Organization of Masculinity*. Chapter 3

Roe v. Wade overturned

Week 10 (3/13 – 3/19)

Watch: See canvas

Assignments due: (1) *Discussion Post*, (2) *Reading Quiz*

Selected Bibliography:

Comfort, Nathaniel. *Can We Cure Genetic Diseases without Slipping into Eugenics?* *The Nation* (2015)

Adair, V. (2002). Branded with Infamy: Inscriptions of Poverty and Class in the United States. *Signs*, 27(2), 451-471.

Finals Week

Week 11 (3/20 – 3/26)

There is no new content for this week. Your single task is to complete the final exam on Canvas, which will be entirely review of the whole term. It will include random variety of previous and new questions. There is no time limit, but you have only one attempt.

Additional Notes:

Any course on power and inequality will lead us to examine and explore beliefs, actions, policies, and practices that some students may find troubling, and even deeply offensive. Examples and issues discussed in class may, at times, include materials that are graphic, explicit, and feature speech advocating or celebrating ideas, actions, and language used to wound or demean. While the use or discussion of those terms and materials should by no means be taken as approval of these practices, frank and open discussion of these types of speech and action may be an intrinsic part of how we analyze power and inequality this term. Students are expected to participate in a spirit of respectful, open-minded, and informed debate. Language or actions meant to disrespect, demean, or personally attack other students or instructors will not be tolerated in any context. Here are some useful guidelines for discussions to keep in mind this term for both discussion sections and our larger sessions:

Discussing to Learn: Contribute ideas and views in the spirit of inquiring and learning together, rather than trying to debate or win arguments (unless the activity is designed as a debate or to assess best arguments).

Mindful Listening: Listen actively with attention and respect for what others are saying, without interrupting or tuning out to focus on preparing one's own contribution.

Stepping Up/Stepping Back: Pay attention to the voices in the room and be mindful of one's contributions. Are there patterns regarding which voices are being heard and which are not? How do I fit in these patterns? Is there need to step back and let others have opportunity to contribute? Is there need to step up and contribute more? Do we feel empowered to hold ourselves accountable for our class participation dynamics?

Listening Lenience: Remember that we are learning together and may not necessarily get something right the first or even second try. Practice being lenient with oneself and with others. Restating what someone just said can provide them an opportunity to clarify or revise their statement. Similarly, it is good practice to state when you say something not quite right and then try to state it again or ask for help in saying it.

Ideas not Individuals: Focus on engaging others' ideas not judging or criticizing individuals. Asking for clarification can be helpful and using language such as "The idea I hear you saying is..." (rather than "you said") or "I don't agree with that idea..." (rather than "I don't agree with you").

Support Our Statements: Offer supporting evidence of some kind to back up your contributions, such as data, clear reasoning, or reference to a text, and be aware that your own experience or an anecdotal story may not fit a larger pattern. Remember that being an exception does not discredit a rule.

A Part is Not the Whole: Remember that your view or experience is your view or experience, a partial opening onto the whole, and not necessarily a general view or experience of everyone; nor are the views or experiences of others necessarily going to match your own. And, just as you cannot represent an entire group of people, nor

can anyone else represent a group of people. It is quite okay for everyone to speak their truth and their experience but working from individual views and experiences to more general ideas or conclusions often requires considerable work.

Accessible Education

If you have a condition that inhibits learning or evaluation under customary circumstances, please let me know. In addition, please request a letter from the Accessible Education Center (346-1155, 164 Oregon Hall) that verifies your disability and states the accommodations that I can make. I will make any reasonable adjustments necessary to improve your learning environment.

Notice of duty to report

We support Title IX and have a duty to report relevant information. The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Any UO employee who becomes aware that such behavior is occurring has a duty to report that information to their supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. The University Health Center and University Counseling and Testing Center can provide assistance and have a greater ability to work confidentially with students.