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# Current Political Thought

POLS 112, Section 2: ThTh 1:30 – 2:45 p.m. Alpine Hall 212

POLS 112, Section 3: TuTh 5:30 – 6:45 p.m. Alpine Hall 212

“To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.”

-- George Orwell (1946)

# Course Description

Political theory offers conceptual resources that can help us better understand and respond to the challenges of our time. This course examines how selected twentieth-century political theorists have thought about—and might help us think about—several of these challenges. The first part of the course examines various theories of power and the state, including early-twentieth-century accounts of anarchism, communism, and libertarianism, as well more recent theories of power and the public sphere. The second part of the course turns to theories of anticolonialism, race, gender, multiculturalism, identity politics, and intersectionality. The third part of the course considers recent debates over the liberal political tradition. We will examine various criticisms and defenses of liberal ideals of individual rights and human equality. Throughout the course, we will also consider recent debates over selected public policy issues, ranging from taxation to health care to military intervention. The aim will not be to mechanically “apply” political theories to political debates, but to bring theory and politics into conversation with each other, using each to illuminate the other. We will also consider different views on what political theory is and how it relates to contemporary public problems. Students in this course will improve their understanding of twentieth-century political thought, as well as their ability to develop and articulate their own ideas about the key political challenges of our time.

**Learning objectives**

Students who successfully complete this course will have:

* learned about the key ideas and political contexts of selected authors in twentieth-century political thought;
* learned about the value, purpose, and limits of political theory;
* improved their ability to read, discuss, and write about politics and political theory;
* improved their capacity to analyze and evaluate difficult texts in both writing and discussion.

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# Required Text

The below text is available at the campus bookstore and from online booksellers. Two copies are on reserve at the campus library. Additional readings and videos are posted on Canvas.

* Andrew Bailey, et al, eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Social and Political Thought: Volume 2: The Twentieth Century and Beyond.* Broadview Press, 2008.

ISBN: 9781551118994

# Requirements and Grading

Attendance and participation (100 points): This course requires active engagement. I expect students to arrive on time and stay for the entire class. You may miss two classes without penalty. Additional absences, unless excused, will affect your participation grade. I will only excuse absences for serious and non-work-related reasons (e.g., doctor visit, family emergency, military duty, jury duty, religious holiday), and only with documentation. *Please do not email me about your absence*. If you want me to excuse an absence, then when you return to class, please give me a written statement with the date(s) of your absence, the reason, and documentation. *In most cases, more than six unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.* Repeated tardiness will affect your grade, but if you arrive late please enter quietly and take a seat. If you ever need to leave early, please let me know before class and sit near the door.

Much of the reading is quite difficult, so you will need to take an active approach to understanding the texts. Study questions to guide your reading are posted on Canvas. You should read allof the assigned reading *before* the day on which it is listed in the schedule. Please also *bring at least one thoughtful question about the assigned reading to each class*. I will frequently call on students to share their questions. To accommodate diverse students, participation grades will be based on a variety of indicators, including the extent to which students: a) attend class ready to discuss the assigned reading; b) prepare thoughtful questions about the reading; c) actively participate in class discussion, group work, writing exercises, and other in-class activities. In calculating your workload for the semester, please consider that this course requires at least six hours per week outside of class (see the Sacramento State [Credit Hour Policy](https://www.csus.edu/academic-affairs/_internal/_documents/credit-hour-policy.pdf)). We will often look up specific passages in the texts during class, so please bring the appropriate text to class. Weekly study guides are posted on Canvas. Please also note that I will not post lectures notes or slides online.

Weekly online reading quizzes (200 points): Quizzes on the *reading for the coming week* (not the past week) will be available on Canvas most weeks from Friday, 9:00 a.m. until Tuesday, 9 a.m. Once you start the quiz, you will have 45 minutes to complete it. (If you have an accommodation for extra time, please let me know.) Incomplete quizzes will be automatically submitted at the deadline. Once you complete the quiz and see your score, you may retake the quiz one time. Your score will then be the average of your two attempts. Each quiz will consist of 5-10 multiple-choice questions on all the readings assigned for the coming week. Quizzes will address the main ideas from the readings, not minor details. Missed quizzes cannot be made-up, but I will drop your lowest four scores. (Grades will be based on 10 out of 14 quizzes). The quiz questions will be based on the weekly study questions posted on Canvas.

In-class midterm exam (250 points) and take-home final exam (250 points): The exams will ask you to demonstrate a clear understanding of the main ideas from course readings and lectures. The midterm will cover the first half of the course; the final will cover the entire course. For the midterm you will need one blue book (any size). The midterm will be closed-book, but you may bring one single sheet of 8.5″ x 11” paper with notes on both sides, in your own handwriting. You must then submit the notes with your exam. The exams will consist of short-answer and essay questions, adapted from the study questions.

Group presentation (200): Students will work in groups of three to prepare a 10-minute class presentation that links course authors to current political issues. Students can choose from a wide range of presentation formats, including dramatic dialog, staged debate, spoken word, song, and video. A detailed assignment page and grading criteria will be posted on Canvas. Presentation groups and due dates will be assigned during the second week of the semester.

Bonus points: Students can receive bonus points for writing reviews of the films, podcasts, and videos in the course schedule. Up to 10 bonus points per review, three reviews maximum. Reviews should be about 300 words, single-spaced, and they should include one paragraph summary and one paragraph evaluation. Reviews must be submitted in class during the week the material appears in the syllabus.

Grades: For all assignments, students will receive a percentage of the total available points, according to the following scale: A+ (98-100%), A (95%), A- (92%), B+ (88%), B (85%), B- (82%), C+ (78%), C (75%), C- (72%), etc. Final course grades will be calculated as follows:

940 points or more: A

900-939 points: A-

870-899 points: B+

840-869 points: B

800-839 points: B-

770-799 points: C+

740-769 points: C

700-739 points: C-

670-699 points: D+

640-669 points: D

600-639 points: D-

600 points or less

# Wireless Devices

Some students like to use a laptop or other wireless device to take notes during class, and some students use wireless devices to read assigned material. But in a classroom wireless devices can be extremely distracting, and studies have shown they often reduce student learning. (See Cindi May, “[A Learning Secret: Don’t Take Notes with a Laptop,](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/)” *Scientific American*, June 3, 2014.) Nonetheless, in this course *wireless devices may be used to take notes, but the wireless receiver must be turned off.* Cell phones must be turned off or set to vibrate or mute. I will ask students to put away wireless devices during class discussions or when students are working in small groups. And of course students may not use wireless devices for any activities not directly related to the course. If you require special accommodation in this regard, please let me know.

# Additional Matters

If you have a disability and require accommodations, please let me know, and please also contact the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities, Lassen Hall 1008, 916-278-6955. For help with writing, stop by the [University Reading and Writing Center](https://www.csus.edu/undergraduate-studies/writing-program/reading-writing-center.html), Calaveras Hall 128, 916-278-6356, [wc@csus.edu](mailto:wc@csus.edu). For low-cost personal counseling, contact the [Center for Counseling and Diagnostic Services](https://www.csus.edu/center/counseling-diagnostic-services/) at Eureka Hall 421, (916) 278-6252, [ccds@csus.edu](mailto:ccds@csus.edu). More broadly, if you are having trouble with any aspect of the course, or if you would just like to talk over the material, please stop by during my office hours or make an appointment to see me. Don't wait until the end of the semester!

No audio or video recordings are allowed in class without my permission. To protect yourself against computer crashes and lost assignments, be sure to keep an electronic or paper copy of every assignment you submit. Please also keep all your returned assignments until you receive your final course grade for the semester. If one of your assignments gets lost, for whatever reason, you are responsible for providing a copy. Students can drop the course online during the first two weeks. The last day to drop with instructor and chair approval (census date) is February 17. Withdrawals after this date are only allowed for “serious and compelling” reasons. For more information see the campus [drop policy](https://catalog.csus.edu/financial-registration-information/registration/#text) the [Add/Drop Petition.](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/student-services-center/forms.html)

Finally, please remember that plagiarism—presenting someone else's work as your own—is a serious violation of academic integrity and university policy. Plagiarism will be punished in proportion to the severity of the case, but any plagiarism is likely to result in a failing grade for the course and may lead to additional penalties, including expulsion from the University. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, please ask me or consult the [library plagiarism website.](http://csus.libguides.com/plagiarism)

# Schedule of topics and reading assignments (subject to change)

Most readings are in the *Broadview Anthology.* Items marked with an asterisk are available on Canvas under the Pages tab. Additional recommended materials are also available on Canvas.

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|  |  | **Part I: Power and the State** |
| 1 | Jan. 21  Jan. 23 | Introduction  \*George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”  Kamsler, “Introduction” in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 3-14 (entire).  QUIZ #1  Recommended:  \* Film: George Orwell: A Life in Pictures (BBC 2003) ([YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6txpumkY5I&feature=youtu.be)) |
| 2 | Jan. 28  Jan. 30 | QUIZ #2  Goldman in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 15-21 (entire).  Lenin in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 22-26 (skip section 3).  Eric Olin Wright, “[How to Be An Anticapitalist Today,](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/)” *Jacobin,* Dec. 12, 2015.  Recommended:  \* Video: PBS: Emma Goldman: An Exceedingly Dangerous Woman. [PBS website](https://www.pbs.org/video/emma-goldman-ajsyzd/) or [Sac State Library (DVD).](https://csus-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=01CALS_ALMA71416757120002901&context=L&vid=01CALS_USL&search_scope=EVERYTHING&tab=everything&lang=en_US) |
| 3 | Feb. 4  Feb. 6 | QUIZ #3  Weber in *Broadview Anthology,* pp. 52-61 (entire)  Schmitt in *Broadview Anthology,* 62-67 (skip section 8).  Hayek in *Broadview Anthology,* pp. 70-79 (entire)  Recommended:  \* [Video: BBC: “Masters of Money,” Part 2: Hayek (Sac State Library)](http://fod.infobase.com.proxy.lib.csus.edu/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=51975) |
| 4 | Feb. 11  Feb. 13 | QUIZ #4  Gentile in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 80-84 (entire)  Arendt in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 85-90, 96-106.  Recommended  \* [Film: “[Vita activa: the spirit of Hannah Arendt](https://csus-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=01CALS_ALMA71419497020002901&context=L&vid=01CALS_USL&lang=en_US&search_scope=EVERYTHING&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=everything&query=any,contains,hannah%20arendt%20film&sortby=rank&mode=Basic)” (Sac State Library)](https://csus-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=01CALS_ALMA71419497020002901&context=L&vid=01CALS_USL&search_scope=EVERYTHING&tab=everything&lang=en_US)  \* [Film: “Hannah Arendt” (Amazon rental)](https://www.amazon.com/Hannah-Arendt-Janet-McTeer/dp/B00G1D5XP2/ref=tmm_aiv_title_1?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=) |
| 5 | Feb. 18  Feb. 20 | QUIZ #5  Foucault in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 107-119, 125-134  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS |
|  |  | **Part II: Race, Gender, and Colonialism** |
| 6 | Feb. 25  Feb. 27 | QUIZ #6  Kamsler, “Introduction,” in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 143-152 (entire).  DuBois in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 153-157 (entire).  King in in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 172-182 (entire).  \* [Letter to Martin Luther King by A Group of Clergymen](http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-martin-luther-king/) |
| 7 | Mar. 3  Mar. 5 | QUIZ #7  Fanon in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 189-197.  \* Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” “The American Dream and the American Negro,” and “The White Man’s Guilt”  Recommended:  \* [Documentary: James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket (Sac State library)](http://proxy.lib.csus.edu/login?url=http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=106564&xtid=49726) |
| 8 | Mar. 10  Mar. 12 | QUIZ #8  De Beauvoir in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 158-171 (entire).  MIDTERM EXAM |
| 9 | Mar. 17  Mar. 19 | QUIZ #9  The Combahee River Collective, [“A Black Feminist Statement”](https://monthlyreview.org/2019/01/01/a-black-feminist-statement/) (1977)  \* Mark Lilla, “[The End of Identity Liberalism,](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html?_r=0)” *The New York Times*, Nov. 18, 2016.  \* Ta-Nehesi Coates, “[America’s First White President](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/),” *The Atlantic,* Oct. 2017.  \* David French, “[Conservative Americans Experience Progressive Identity Politics as Hatred,](http://www.nationalreview.com/article/451551/progressive-identity-politics-are-hateful-toward-conservatives)” *National Review*, Sept. 20, 2017. |
| 10 | Mar. 24  Mar. 26 | QUIZ #10  \* Kimberlé Crenshaw, “[Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait,”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/?utm_term=.80c41cffb372) *The Washington Post,* Sept. 24, 2015.  \* Andrew Sullivan, “[Is Intersectionality a Religion?](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/03/is-intersectionality-a-religion.html)” *New York*, Mar. 10, 2017.  \* Kwame Anthony Appiah, ["Go Ahead, Speak for Yourself,"](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/opinion/sunday/speak-for-yourself.html?emc=edit_th_180812&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=131251410812) The New York Times, August 10, 2018.  \* Barbara Ransby, [“Black Lives Matter Is Democracy in Action,”](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/black-lives-matter-leadership.html) *The New York Times*, Oct. 21, 2017.  Recommended:  \* TED Talk: [Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality)  STUDENT PRESENTATIONS |
|  |  | SPRING BREAK |
|  |  | **Part III: Liberalism and Its Critics** |
| 11 | Apr. 7  Apr. 9 | QUIZ #11  Sager and Kymlicka, “Introduction,” in Broadview Anthology, 251-256 (selection).  Rawls, in Broadview Anthology, pp. 265-273, 278-281, 285-293 (skip sections 5, 6, 13, 24).  Recommended  \* Video: Michael Sandel, “Justice,” lectures on [Nozick](http://justiceharvard.org/lecture-5-free-to-choose/) and [Rawls](http://justiceharvard.org/lecture-14-a-deal-is-a-deal/) |
| 12 | Apr. 14  Apr. 16 | QUIZ #12  Nozick in Broadview Anthology, pp. 312-316, 319-321, 323-324 (skip “Patterning” and “Sen’s Argument”)  Walzer in *Broadview Anthology*, 392-408 (entire). |
| 13 | Apr. 21  Apr. 23 | QUIZ #13  Berlin in *Broadview Anthology*, pp. 343-366, 368-370 (skip section 7).  Okin in *Broadview Anthology,* pp. 488-496, 507-511. |
| 14 | Apr 28  Apr. 30 | QUIZ #14  Reading TBA  Reading TBA |
| 15 | May 5  May 7 | STUDENT PRESENTATIONS  \*Ursula Leguin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”  Course summary and review. |
|  |  | Take-home FINAL EXAM due on Canvas by Friday, May 15, 12:00 p.m. |