

Exploring United States Government: Political Theory and Practice



Above: Around the turn of the twentieth century, a mixed group of neatly dressed young people – perhaps under the direction of their schoolmaster or chaperone, on the right – respectfully consider Horatio Greenough’s 1840 sculpture “Enthroned Washington,” then on display on the east lawn of the United States’ Capitol in Washington, DC. (Today it can be found indoors on the second floor of the Smithsonian American History museum.) What did these young people think of this remarkable object, c. 1900? Did they unquestionably believe George Washington to be the Zeus-like incarnation of American civic virtue, truly worthy of such an artistic apotheosis? (Or were they snickering a bit at the sight of a topless George, stiff-lipped and with finger pointing toward heaven?) Did they really accept the sculptor’s hint here that American governance could be traced back to Athens and Rome? (Or was that a stretch, a notion to be put aside in the age of dynamos, steamships, and telephone calls?) What did they imagine their “social contract” to be, between each other? Or between themselves and Washington and the other “Founding Fathers” of American history? Were they confident that the American system – that a Federal Democratic Republic – was the best of all possible systems?

What do we think of these questions today?

What do we discover when we consider United States government in the context of political theory and historical examples, from antiquity to the present?

Course description from the catalog:

“An exploration of United States government, with particular reference to past and present political theory. Students will be exposed to a wide variety of thinkers and ideas, as both the sources of American law and government and as comparative examples. Connections will be made between theory and practice, and students will be encouraged to think creatively about the nature, history, and present course of American government and politics. Critical thinking and productive civil discourse will be consistently emphasized.”

Best contact: email tfarnold@bsu.edu at any time with any questions or concerns.

Office hours:

MWF 2:00-4:00 PM and TR 10:00-12:00 or by appointment, if these times don't work for your schedule. Significant time during scheduled in-person class meetings will be available to go over and clarify general questions about readings, assignment instructions, evaluation criteria and policies, etc.

Course goals:

An introduction to the basic structures and principles of United States government.

Exposure to influential political theorists and past historical examples that have significantly shaped governance and politics in the United States.

Experience in thinking critically about politics, and forming independent responses to important political questions.

Practice thinking, writing, and speaking clearly, critically, and convincingly.

Class policies:

The course Canvas site is the essential organizing hub for this class, including announcements and other instructions. Students should regularly and routinely check the course Canvas site.

Attendance will be taken for all in-person sessions according to the policies explained in the student handbook. Please promptly contact the instructor with any questions regarding the application of those policies.

Unless a specific exception is announced for a given class exercise, students are not expected to use a laptop, tablet, phone, or smart watch at any time. All such devices need to be stored away and kept out of sight for the duration of all class periods. Students are expected to put away any such electronic devices upon entering the classroom. Students who require such a device for accommodation or other valid reasons will of course be excused from this policy, but only after prior communication with the instructor.

For the most part, class discussion readings and other materials will be assigned from the *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* book or distributed in class as a hard copy document. Some of these assignments may also be available in pdf or similar format on the course Canvas site. Occasionally, some discussion materials may entirely online. In such cases, students are particularly encouraged to make careful notes and bring these to class – students should not expect to be able to refer to online material during class sessions.

If the discussion reading for a given class session is in the *Princeton Readings in Political Thought* book, students are expected to bring that book with them to any class session. Otherwise, if there is no expectation of discussing a reading from that book, students are not required to bring it to class. Similarly, students are expected to bring hard copy readings to the relevant class discussion session.

Students are expected to read and consider all readings carefully and thoughtfully. Students are also expected to take hand written notes on all readings, and during any class sessions, as they see fit. Students may bring and refer to these notes during relevant class discussion sessions. Students are encouraged to discuss readings with the instructor during office hours, both before and after a relevant scheduled class discussion.

Students who miss scheduled discussion sessions are expected to contact the instructor after any such absence to arrange for an appropriate makeup activity or exercise, as warranted. Students who miss a scheduled examination are expected to make up that test as soon as possible. Normally, all makeup work is expected to be completed within seven working days of the original due date or testing date. In exceptional circumstances, additional time may be available, including an incomplete grade at the end of the semester.

Students who do not makeup missed discussions or examinations may receive a grade of 0%. That 0% grade will then be replaced by the makeup grade, except in cases of an unexcused absence or a violation of Academy or class policies.

Grades will be posted to PowerSchool following a reasonable time for evaluation. Discussion grades will normally be posted within a few days of the last class session pertaining to a given topic or week. Exams will normally be evaluated and the grades posted within ten working days of the testing date. Students will be informed in circumstances of delay. Students should regularly and routinely check their grades on PowerSchool, share those grades with parents or guardians, and promptly contact the instructor with any questions or concerns.

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please review the student handbook for a full discussion of the relevant policies.

There may be provision for extra credit or additional or replacement assignments. Such opportunities, if any, will be announced during the semester.

If circumstances warrant, alternate assignments, extended due dates, and other exceptions to stated policies can be arranged on a case-by-case basis after consultation with the instructor. All reasonable accommodation will be made.

Any student with a disability will be accorded appropriate accommodation, as arranged in advance.

As the semester develops, course topics and readings may be amended as the instructor sees fit. Therefore, be alert to all announcements and any revisions to the below calendar of readings and threaded discussions.

This syllabus may be amended by the instructor at any time. In such cases, students will always receive timely prior notification of any changes.

Required statement regarding unexcused absences:

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator [Ms. Drumm] in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four (4) or more unexcused absences will lead to academic and residential consequences beyond the scope of this class [as] determined by the Office of Academic Affairs (i.e., residential groundings, parent/principal conference, and/or detention).

Required syllabi statements:

1. Ball State inclusive excellence statement:

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State's commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, Inclusive Excellence at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive. Unfortunately, there might be occasions when something occurs that disrupts our progress toward meeting these objectives. In this case, we encourage any member of the Academy community to file a Campus Climate Report (CCR) https://bsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mbRbL5acAntUTI. All reports will be taken seriously, and appropriate responses will be carried out by Academy administration.

2. Indiana Academy wireless device policy:

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication devices for non-instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all portable wireless devices, that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic accommodations,

individualized education programs, or with instructor approval permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health, safety, and/or well-being. The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to; a verbal warning, temporary seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated consequences for repeated improper use.

3. Indiana Academy absence policy:

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four or more unexcused absences in any particular class a student takes will lead to academic and residential consequences to be determined by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Residential Life that may include detention, residential groundings, parent/principal conference, among others.

4. Indiana Academy Humanities Division artificial intelligence (AI) statement:

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course

5. Indiana Academy History Department content statement:

As with many history classes, the lectures, readings, and discussions [in this course] will include a range of topics that may be triggering, emotionally distressing, and difficult for some students. Engaging with topics such as slavery and human suffering is essential to this discipline. History seeks to understand the experiences and thought processes of former generations, whether for good or ill. Sometimes the language and word choices used by people in the past may be insensitive or politically incorrect today. Nevertheless, the goal of history is to understand the past within its own context and time. If a reading, image shown in class, or discussion is truly troubling to anyone, please do not hesitate to talk to your instructor. In some circumstances, an alternative reading can be assigned.

Evaluation overview:

8 bi-weekly discussion grades @ 50 points each	400
4 in-class tests @ 100 points each	400
total	800 points + any extra credit

Grading scale:

Percentage	Grade
.940-1000	A
.900-939	A-
.870-899	B+
.830-869	B
.800-829	B-
.770-799	C+
.730-769	C
.700-729	C-
Below 700	D*

Discussions:

Students will receive a discussion grade for each of the first sixteen weeks of the semester, Week 1 through Week 16. Evaluation will principally be based on spoken participation in any in-class or virtual sessions. Students should feel free at any time to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding discussion evaluation.

Examinations:

There will be four in-class tests, roughly at the end of each month or four-week period of the semester. The format of these tests will be shared prior to the first test; the intention is for subsequent tests to follow the same format.

Further instructions and evaluation criteria will be provided prior to each test. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding these essays, including student evaluation and request for accommodation.

Book and readings:

Students need only acquire one book from the bookroom: Mitchell Cohen, ed., *Princeton Readings in Political Thought*. Students only need to bring this book to class if a reading from this book is assigned for that day.

Additional readings will be provided by the instructor as hard copy handouts in class.

Students need to be alert to the calendar below, as well as to all class announcements and syllabus changes, to be sure they are reading and preparing to discuss the correct reading for a given day's class (and that day's associated online discussion, if any). The basic "homework" of this class is reading and carefully considering the assigned texts.

Course calendar of readings and online discussion:

Introduction: What is Government?

Week 1

M Jan 6	Welcome session
W Jan 8	BBC nature documentary, "The Empire of the Ants" (YouTube link on Canvas site)
F Jan 10	Bernard Mandeville, "The Grumbling Hive" from <i>The Fable of the Bees</i>

Part 1, The School of Athens: What is Democracy?

Week 2

M Jan 13	Introduction to the Athenian democratic constitution
W Jan 15	Plato, Socrates' <i>Apology</i>
F Jan 17	Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Week 3

- M Jan 20 MLK Day, no class
- W Jan 22 Plato, Socrates' "Allegory of the Cave"
- F Jan 24 Thucydides, Pericles' "Funeral Oration"

Week 4

- M Jan 27 Thucydides, "Melian Dialog"
- W Jan 29 Plato, *Republic*
- F Jan 31 Plato, *Republic*

Week 5

- M Feb 3 Extended weekend, no class
- W Feb 5 Aristotle, *Politics*
- F Feb 7 Examination 1 covering Weeks 2-5

Part 2, SPQR: What is a Republic?

Week 6

- M Feb 10 Introduction to the Roman Republican constitution
- W Feb 12 Polybius, "Roman Political Virtue" and Livy, "Horatio" and "Cincinnatus"
- F Feb 14 Polybius, "The Balanced Constitution"

Week 7

- M Feb 17 Introduction to the Roman Imperial constitution
- W Feb 19 Suetonius, "Life of Augustus"
- F Feb 21 Suetonius, "Life of Nero"

Week 8

- M Feb 24 Introduction to Christian Rome
- W Feb 26 Augustine, *City of God*
- F Feb 28 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*

Spring Break

Week 9

- M Mar 10 Petrarch, “Letter to Livy” and “Letter to Colonna,” and Machiavelli, “Letter to Francesco Vettori”
- W Mar 12 Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- F Mar 14 Examination 2 covering Weeks 6-9

Part 3: The Social Contract

Week 10

- M Mar 17 Introduction to 17th and 18th c. revolutionary politics
- W Mar 19 Hobbes, *Leviathan*
- F Mar 21 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*

Week 11

- M Mar 24 United States Declaration of Independence
- W Mar 26 Rousseau, *Origins of Inequality*
- F Mar 28 Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

Week 12

- M Mar 31 United States Constitution and Bill of Rights
- W Apr 2 French Revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen
- F Apr 4 Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Economic Bill of Rights

Week 13

- M Apr 7 Marie-Olympe de Gouges, *Rights of Women*
- W Apr 9 Douglass, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*
- F Apr 11 Examination 3 covering Weeks 10-13

Part 4: Alternative and Contemporary Perspectives

Week 14

- M Apr 14 Confucius, *Analects*
- W Apr 16 Islamic political texts
- F Apr 18 South Asian political texts

Week 15

- M Apr 21 No class, extended weekend
- W Apr 23 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
- F Apr 25 John Rawls, "Distributive Justice"

Week 16

- M Apr 28 Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*
- W Apr 30 Nussbaum, *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*
- F May 2 Concluding discussion
- Examination 4 covering Weeks 14-16 during Finals Week, date to be announced