

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 building. (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 inside 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, telegraphs, and locomotives?) 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 8:30-9:30 and TR 10:00-12:00 + 2:00-3:00 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 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.

Students are free to use a laptop, tablet, or phone for class purposes at any time. Some discussion readings will be online or distributed as a pdf document. Students may read these on a device, or print them out as hard copies, as they see fit. In any case, students are expected to be able to refer to any text under discussion.

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 in-person class session. Otherwise, if there is no expectation of discussing a reading from that book, students are not required to bring it to class.

Students are expected to read all discussion readings carefully and thoughtfully by the indicated dates in the course calendar of readings and threaded discussion dates (see below). Students are encouraged to take notes on all readings, and during any class sessions, as they see fit. Students are not expected to have mastered any reading before the class session in which that text is discussed. However, if students find that they do not understand the basic ideas and examples in a text, even after in-class conversation, then they have a responsibility to further work on that text – with their fellow students as well as with the instructor – to be able to contribute to the online threaded discussion (and respond to any written essay question).

A generous time allowance will be provided for all online threaded discussions and for all essays (“papers”). If you need extra time, please ask. Reasonable accommodations will be provided should circumstances warrant. In the case of missing threaded discussion posts, a grade of 0% may be entered if a required discussion post is not made within seven days, and no accommodation or extension has been granted. In the case of missed essay assignments, a grade of 0% may be entered if no essay is received by the final due date, and no extension has been granted. Any 0% grade may be replaced upon submission of work, with an appropriate grade penalty for lateness, and after discussion with the instructor to determine acceptance and any appropriate penalty.

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 or final online discussion thread pertaining to a given topic or week. Essays will normally be evaluated and the grades posted within a week of submission. 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. Indiana Academy Mask Policy:

a. Requirement

The Indiana Academy will follow Ball State University's mask policy. Effective July 1, 2020, all people on campus—including faculty, staff, students, vendors, contractors, suppliers, and visitors—should wear face masks (covering nose and mouth) while inside campus buildings. Face masks are specifically required in the following situations:

- i. When in the presence of others (indoors or outdoors) and physical distancing is difficult to maintain, such as in hallways, elevators, stairs, public spaces, and common areas;
- ii. When in a classroom or laboratory;
- iii. When using campus transportation (such as a shuttle bus);
- iv. When multiple individuals are in a University vehicle.

Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to bring their own mask. Masks will be provided to anyone who is unable to bring a mask or their mask is damaged.

b. Non-compliance

If a student declines to wear a face mask as required, the student will be referred to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. If the situation occurs in a classroom or other academic setting, it is considered a classroom management issue, and the teacher will remind the student of the requirement and give the student a chance to comply with it prior to referring the matter to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. Wearing masks is crucial to preventing the spread of COVID-19 to others.

2. Ball State diversity and inclusion 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 and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>.

3. 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:

16 weekly discussion grades @ 25 points each	400
4 written essays @ 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.

Essays:

Students are required to write four essays, one for each of the four parts of the class (see course calendar below). There will be new prompts each week (on Friday), so students have more than one option (and due date) for writing each essay. These essays are not research papers – the questions will always pertain to the discussion readings and other source materials.

Unless otherwise indicated, essays are due in one week, on the following Friday. The exact due date time is always 5:00 pm on the given day. Completed essays may be turned in during class time, or may be placed in Dr. Arnold's faculty mailbox by 5:00 pm on the due date. Students must always provide a hard copy, if at all possible (contact Dr. Arnold if an exception is warranted).

Further instructions and evaluation criteria will be provided with each specific essay option assignment. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any questions or concerns regarding these essays, including student evaluation.

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, in most (if not all) cases as a pdf document posted to the course Canvas site.

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:

Given readings and dates may change over the course of the semester. Be alert to all announcements.

Part 1: The School of Athens

Week 1

M Jan 3	Introduction	
W Jan 5	Plato, Socrates' <i>Apology</i>	on Canvas
F Jan 7	MLK, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"	on Canvas

Week 2

M Jan 10	Plato, Socrates' "Allegory of the Cave"	on Canvas
W Jan 12	Thucydides, Pericles' "Funeral Oration"	on Canvas
F Jan 14	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 3

M Jan 17	MLK day, no class	
W Jan 19	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Part 1	on Canvas
F Jan 21	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Part 2	on Canvas

Week 4

M Jan 24	Thucydides, "Melian Dialog"	on Canvas
W Jan 26	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 96-105
F Jan 28	No new reading or online discussion	

Course calendar of readings and online discussion, continued:

Given readings and dates may change over the course of the semester. Be alert to all announcements.

Part 2: The Virtuous Republic, from Rome to Renaissance Florence

Week 5

M Jan 31 Polybius, "Roman Political Virtue" all on Canvas
Livy, "Horatio"
Livy, "Cincinnatus"

W Feb 2 Polybius, "The Balanced Constitution" on Canvas

F Feb 4 No new reading or online discussion

Week 6

M Feb 7 Suetonius, "Life of Augustus" on Canvas

W Feb 9 Suetonius, "Life of Nero" on Canvas

F Feb 11 No new reading or online discussion

Week 7

M Feb 14 Augustine, *City of God* *Princeton Readings*, p 115-23

W Feb 16 Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* *Princeton Readings*, p 131-35

F Feb 18 No new reading or online discussion

Week 8

M Feb 21 Petrarch, "Letter to Livy" both on Canvas
Machiavelli, "Letter to Francesco Vettori"

W Feb 23 Machiavelli, *The Prince* on Canvas

F Feb 25 No new reading or online discussion

Course calendar of readings and online discussion, continued:

Given readings and dates may change over the course of the semester. Be alert to all announcements.

Part 3: The Social Contract

Week 9

M Feb 28	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>	on Canvas
W Mar 2	Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i>	on Canvas
F Mar 4	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 10

M Mar 14	Rousseau, <i>Origins of Inequality</i>	on Canvas
W Mar 16	Rousseau, <i>The Social Contract</i>	on Canvas
F Mar 18	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 11

M Mar 21	Mayflower Compact Declaration of Independence	both on Canvas
W Mar 23	US Constitution and Bill of Rights	on Canvas
F Mar 25	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 12

M Mar 28	Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 334-5
W Mar 30	FDR, Four Freedoms and Economic Bill of Rights	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 567-72
F Apr 1	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 13

M Apr 4	Marie-Olympe de Gouges, <i>Rights of Women</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 342-46
W Apr 6	Douglass, <i>What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 411-26
F Apr 8	No new reading or online discussion	

Course calendar of readings and online discussion:

Given readings and dates may change over the course of the semester. Be alert to all announcements.

Part 4: Contemporary Concerns

Week 14

M Apr 11	John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 685-89
W Apr 13	John Rawls, "Distributive Justice"	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 704-8
F Apr 15	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 15

M Apr 18	Young, <i>Justice and the Politics of Difference</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 729-37
W Apr 20	Coates, "The Case for Reparations"	On Canvas
F Apr 22	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 16

M Apr 25	Nussbaum, <i>Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 738-45
W Apr 27	Müller, <i>What is Populism?</i>	<i>Princeton Readings</i> , p 758-761
F Apr 29	No new reading or online discussion	

Week 17

M May 2	No new reading or online discussion	
M May 4	No new reading or online discussion	
M May 6	No new reading or online discussion	