

Political Theory 4204: American Political Thought

Florida Atlantic University, Fall 2024

Course Credits: 3.000

Prerequisites/Corequisites: None

WF 12:30 – 1:50PM, General Classroom South Boca Room 102

Professor: Dr. Rebecca LeMoine

Office: SO 384C

Contact: rlemoine@fau.edu or (561) 287-3947

Office Hours: Tues. 10AM-2PM,
or by appt.

Catalogue Description

A review of major themes in American political thought from the colonial period to the present and the effects of political ideas on political institutions and behavior.

Course Description

In contemporary American political discourse, politicians often refer to the “founding principles” or the beliefs of the “founding fathers.” Yet, what exactly are these principles? How and why did they originate? What effect have they had on American political institutions and ideology? Have these principles stood the test of time, or do they need to be updated as America changes?

This course examines major themes in American political thought from the colonial period to the present. Our investigation consists exclusively of primary texts—from foundational works such as *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Federalist*, to major speeches by figures like President Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., to treatises by influential thinkers in the libertarian and progressive traditions of American political thought. Rather than a coherent set of ideals, the texts studied in this course reveal that, since the beginning, Americans have disagreed on how the nation should be governed. Debates have centered on such issues as the meaning of liberty, the proper scope and functions of government, and questions of citizenship and identity. By studying how these debates have developed over the course of American history, you will gain insight into the unique challenges of American democracy while strengthening your own thinking on issues related to contemporary American politics.

Course Delivery Mode

This class is designated as an “**In-Person**” course. Attendance on campus is required.

Objectives

- 1) Become familiar with major questions, themes, and approaches in American political thought and their application to American political life.
- 2) Learn to read and interpret political theory texts.
- 3) Improve ability to construct persuasive arguments, both verbal and written.
- 4) Practice a more contemplative and self-aware form of citizenship, and consider its effects on political life and personal fulfillment.

Classroom Expectations

To be successful in this course (i.e., to meet the course objectives and to receive a passing grade), you should:

1. Regularly attend class.

Regular attendance is vital for success in this course. As you will discover, political theory is a discursive enterprise. Simply put, it is a *conversation* about foundational questions relating to political life, such as the nature of justice and what the best form of government is. Since there are no easy-to-find, indisputable answers to these kinds of questions, political theorists must engage each other in persuasive argument. That means that a large part of what you can “gain” from this course happens through classroom discussions. Therefore, attendance will be taken promptly at the start of every class meeting. Arriving late, leaving early, or repeatedly leaving and re-entering the room is disruptive both to me and your peers; if you cannot regularly be present for the duration of the class, then you should reconsider your enrollment. Please note that if you are being too disruptive, you may be asked to leave.

2. Complete all assigned readings prior to the start of class.

This class aims to bring to life the art of Socratic conversation. Though I may stop at points to clarify some fundamental concepts with the help of a few PowerPoint slides, a video clip, a demonstration, etc., most of our class time will be spent working through the material *together*. Throughout each session, I will ask questions to help you all uncover the meaning of the text for yourselves. This questioning can take many forms. I may ask you to turn to a specific passage, read it aloud, and then explain what you think the author means. I may ask a more open-ended question (e.g., “What does the author say about x?”) and expect you to provide the textual evidence. I may break you up into small groups to discuss whether the argument is persuasive.

To prepare for this experience, you should come to class having completed the assigned readings listed on the syllabus for that day. I highly recommend that you also show up with copious notes/thoughts/questions about that day’s readings. If no one has done the readings, or only a few students have done the readings, then the class will not go very far. Such is the nature of Socratic inquiry: it depends heavily on student engagement. The purpose of this is to help you become a better reader and thinker. You and your classmates will get out of the class what you put in. Aim to be a good classroom citizen.

3. Practice “close” reading.

Unlike many political science texts, political theory readings tend to be dense, requiring focused attention. There are no “abstracts” at the top, nor is it possible to skim these readings and retain much understanding. Rather, the readings are similar to what you would expect from a philosophy course: a series of arguments you must follow closely, sometimes riddled with unfamiliar words, difficult syntax, and perplexing ideas. This means you should set aside ample time *before* class to read the material listed on the syllabus for that day, as you will likely find that you need to *re-read* parts of the text. You should also be an active reader. As you read, write a few words summarizing each paragraph in the margins, underline/highlight any phrases or passages that stand out to you, look up the definitions of unfamiliar words, write down any questions or reactions you have in response to the arguments the author is making, etc.

4. Practice “sympathetic” reading.

While “critical thinking” is valuable, before we can think “critically” we need to ensure that we have understood the text properly and given the arguments fair consideration. The practice of “sympathetic” reading, which entails approaching each text as though it were a friend, will therefore be encouraged throughout the term. Each class session, I will push you to think “sympathetically” about the text by taking on the voice of the author in defense of the arguments. This means at times I will appear to adopt some unsavory positions. If you are uncomfortable with teachers who play “devil’s advocate,” or don’t like it when teachers sometimes withhold their own opinions in an effort to get you to think for yourself, then you probably will not enjoy this class.

5. Actively and respectfully participate in class discussions.

For a Socratic discussion to work, everyone must be present—not just physically, but psychologically. You cannot be present if you are checking email, texting, watching ESPN, etc. Accordingly, **electronic devices are strongly discouraged. If you choose to use an electronic device, be prepared for me to call on you.**

You should endeavor to contribute regularly to class discussions, whether by offering thoughtful reflections on the assigned readings, pointing us to relevant passages, or asking questions. The quantity of your contributions matters less to me than the quality (by which I mean genuine expressions of the desire to learn), but you should make a presence for yourself in this class. Please note that I expect you to treat your peers and me with respect. We may disagree, but we will do so cordially. That means being an attentive listener, raising your hand and waiting to be called on, and critiquing the argument rather than the person who made it.

6. Be pro-active with your education.

With many students and limited class time, not every question will be satisfactorily addressed for every student. If you find yourself confused about anything, first try re-reading the syllabus or assigned reading. If you are still lost, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me during office hours or via email.

Required Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the FAU Bookstore. **I highly recommend that you purchase hard copies of these exact editions.** I also highly recommend that you print the readings posted on Canvas (approximately 100 pages; at the FAU rate of \$0.08/page, this will cost about \$8.00). Throughout each class session, you will be asked to turn to specific pages in the text. If you do not have the same edition or cannot easily turn to a given page, you will be lost and unable to contribute as effectively. Moreover, students often find it helpful to be able to write directly in the margins of the text. That said, the choice is yours. **If you choose to use an electronic device, be prepared for me to call on you.**

1. Calhoun, John C., *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, Liberty Fund, 1992. [ISBN: 9780865971035](#)
2. Croly, Herbert, *The Promise of American Life*, James Madison Library in American Politics, 2014. [ISBN: 9780691160689](#)

3. Hamilton, Alexander, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist: The Gideon Edition*, Liberty Fund, 2001. ISBN: 9780865972896
4. Sumner, William Graham, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, Caxton Press, 1983. ISBN: 9780870041662. (Note: This text often goes out of print, so any version you can find will suffice.)

Instructor Availability

It is important to me to be accessible to students throughout the semester. Below are the ways you can contact me:

FAQ Discussion Board

You should ask general, course-related questions in the FAQ discussion board on Canvas, which will be active throughout the semester. If you have questions of a personal nature, you should email the instructor from your FAU email address or schedule an office hour appointment.

Email

Except for weekends and holidays, I will typically respond to email within 48 hours. **Please use your FAU email address rather than the Canvas inbox system.** Follow basic norms of professionalism (don't start an email with "hey"). If you have questions about what is appropriate, this is a helpful resource <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

Office Hours

On *Tuesdays from 10:00AM – 2:00PM*, I will hold open office hours in my office, SO 384C. No appointment is necessary.

Course Requirements

Participation:	20%
Quizzes:	20%
Discussion Board:	15%
Midterm Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	25%

Participation (20%)

Your participation grade will be comprised of two, equally weighted components: attendance and participation in class discussions/activities.

- Attendance: Attendance will be taken promptly at the start of each class meeting. Everyone is permitted *one unexcused absence* and *two excused absences*. **Excused absences require make up work, which is due within a week of the absence.** For an absence to be excused, you must clear it with me in advance or, in cases of illness or emergency, as soon as possible. The following generally count as *unexcused* absences: slept through alarm; need to study/work; need to finish an assignment; leaving early/arriving back late from vacation; bad hangover.

If you think you will miss more than three classes due to University-approved activities, please see me at the start of the semester. Please note I will abide by *FAU's official*

attendance policy: “Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University-approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student’s responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student’s final course grade as a direct result of such absence.”

- **Participation:** Attendance makes up only half of your overall participation grade; the other half is based on your participation in class discussions/activities. This means **you cannot earn above a 50% for your participation grade if you never speak in class, even if you have perfect attendance.** Students who struggle with classroom participation should therefore schedule a meeting with me during the first week of class to discuss strategies for increasing classroom participation. It is also possible to supplement one’s participation grade with office hour visits, emails demonstrating engagement with the material, Canvas discussion board posts, etc. If, on the other hand, you do not struggle with public speaking, note that speaking frequently does not guarantee you a good participation grade. **I value quality of contributions over quantity.** You must reference details from the readings and point the class to specific passages to earn a good participation grade.

Quizzes (20%)

A short quiz will be administered promptly at the beginning of class at least once per week. These quizzes will test how closely you read the text(s) assigned for that day. Please note: **if you do not do the reading, you will not pass the quiz.** As you will discover, the quizzes will ask about details not found on Sparknotes, Wikipedia, etc. It is therefore essential to do the readings in full. During the quiz, you may use notes you have handwritten on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook created for this class. To ensure your grade is not adversely affected by a particularly difficult quiz, **I will drop your lowest three quiz scores.** There are **no make-up quizzes.** If you walk into class after the quiz has already been collected, you will not be able to take it.

Discussion Board (15%)

By its nature, this course tends to encourage thought-provoking discussions that often leave students wanting more time for dialogue. With this in mind, I have set up a discussion board on Canvas. To encourage broad participation, you will be required to write **four** posts: one “leader post” (worth 6 points) and three “response posts” (worth 3 points each). At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up for days to complete these posts. Further instructions will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.

Exams (45%)

Two exams will be administered to test your knowledge of and ability to analyze course material. The midterm will cover material from the first two sections of the course. The final exam will be cumulative, but will stress material from the third section of the course. Each test will contain a

mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. A review sheet will be distributed and discussed in class prior to each exam.

Grading Policies

- *Exams*: Make up exams will be administered only for university-approved absences (see attendance policy above), and in all but the most extraordinary of circumstances must be taken within 48 hours of the original exam at a time designated by the instructor. Note that I reserve the right to administer a different version of the exam.
- *Quizzes*: There are no make up quizzes. If you miss a quiz for an unexcused absence, that quiz will count as one of your 3 dropped scores. If you miss a quiz for an excused absence, then the number of points for that quiz will be subtracted from the total number of quiz points when calculating your quiz grade. In other words, if you miss a quiz for an excused absence, then the quiz simply won't count for or against you.
- *Discussion board posts*: Discussion board posts are due within 24 hours of the end of the class session (*i.e.*, by 2PM the following day). Late posts will be penalized 5% if less than an hour late. Beyond an hour late (even by a single minute), posts will be penalized 10% per every 24-hour period late. This means that your post will not be accepted for any credit if it is 10 or more days late. The best way to avoid a late penalty is to make sure to submit your work well ahead of the deadline.
- *Assignment Feedback Policy*: I will provide feedback on all submitted assignments within two weeks of the submission date. If an assignment requires a longer review period, I will communicate that to you. Participation will be assessed by the end of section II.
- *Graded Work*: I will not discuss grades on any assignments for 24 hours after they have been returned. If, after 24 hours reflection, you do not understand why you received a particular grade, send me a written memo via email and I will respond as soon as possible.
- *Extra Credit*: There will be an extra credit question on every quiz, allowing you to accumulate extra credit points throughout the semester. In addition, you can receive a 1% bump to your final course grade (which can mean the difference between an "A" and an "A-") by visiting me during office hours. To receive the extra credit, you must: (1) prepare a few questions or passages from the readings you want to discuss and (2) complete the visit **by the end of the final exam period (by 1:00PM on Dec. 6th)**. You can only receive the extra credit points once, though additional office hour visits can help to supplement your participation grade.

Grading Scale

A = 94-100	A- = 91-93.99	B+ = 87-90.99	B = 83-86.99
B- = 80-82.99	C+ = 77-79.99	C = 73-76.99	C- = 70-72.99
D+ = 67-69.99	D = 63-66.99	D- = 60-62.99	F = below 60

Please be aware that you can track grades for individual assignments on the Canvas 'gradebook' but do not rely on the Canvas reported total. The percentages do not calculate correctly and many assignments cannot be inputted correctly into the interface. Throughout the semester if you have any concerns you can ask me for an update on your grade.

Honor Code Violations

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf.

Please note that I take plagiarism very seriously. If I catch you plagiarizing on a paper, you will receive an automatic “F” in the course and will be reported to the university, which will likely result in a permanent honor violation notation on your transcript. So that we are all on the same page, here is the university’s definition of plagiarism (found in the document linked above):

- “1. The presentation of words from any other source or another person as one’s own without proper quotation and citation.*
- 2. Putting someone else’s ideas or facts into your own words (paraphrasing) without proper citation.*
- 3. Turning in someone else’s work as one’s own, including the buying and selling of term papers or assignments.” (FAU Code of Academic Integrity, 2.B)*

Disabilities

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and follow all SAS procedures. SAS has offices across three of FAU’s campuses – Boca Raton, Davie and Jupiter – however disability services are available for students on all campuses. For more information, please visit the SAS website at www.fau.edu/sas/. If you require a special accommodation, please make an appointment at the beginning of the semester to discuss the accommodation with me.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAP) Center

Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>.

Policy on the Recording of Lectures

Students enrolled in this course may record video or audio of class lectures for their own personal educational use. A class lecture is defined as a formal or methodical oral presentation as part of a university course intended to present information or teach students about a particular subject. Recording class activities other than class lectures, including but not limited to student presentations (whether individually or as part of a group), class discussion (except when incidental to and incorporated within a class lecture), labs, clinical presentations such as patient

history, academic exercises involving student participation, test or examination administrations, field trips, and private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the lecturer, is prohibited. Recordings may not be used as a substitute for class participation or class attendance and may not be published or shared without the written consent of the faculty member. Failure to adhere to these requirements may constitute a violation of the University's Student Code of Conduct and/or the Code of Academic Integrity.

It should also be noted that one of the objectives of this course is to facilitate critical thinking and debate around topics, theories, and concepts where disagreement is not only anticipated, but encouraged. The ability to think critically, express your ideas clearly, and respond to the professor and other students civilly are the keystones of the academic experience. In this course, the professor will provide instruction in an objective manner and will remain open to a wide variety of viewpoints, so long as those viewpoints are evidence-based and presented in a respectful way. During class, the professor may take positions and make statements for the sole purpose of accomplishing an academic objective or enhancing the learning environment. Additionally, the adoption of class materials for this course does not imply an endorsement of the full content of those materials or the positions of the authors of those materials. Often the professor will provide materials as a point of departure for critical thinking and debate. Students should keep in mind that the ideas presented or discussed during class may not necessarily reflect the professor's personal beliefs or opinions on the subject matter.

Course Schedule

(CV) = reading on Canvas

Section I: Founding Principles of American Government

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
21-Aug	Introduction		
23-Aug	Founding Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adams, "Thoughts on Government" (CV) "Declaration of Independence" (CV) "The Articles of Confederation" (CV) "The Constitution" (CV) 	
28-Aug	Consolidation and Natural Aristocracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lee, "Letters from the Federal Farmer"(CV) Yates, "Essays of Brutus" (CV) 	
30-Aug	Energetic Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jefferson, "Letters on the Constitution" (CV) Henry, "Debate in the Virginia Ratifying Convention" (CV) 	
04-Sep	Democratic <i>Realpolitik</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch <i>All the King's Men</i> in class 	
06-Sep	Democratic <i>Realpolitik</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish <i>All the King's Men</i> (Professor at APSA conference) 	
11-Sep	Republican Government in a Large Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Federalist</i> 1, 9, & 39 	

13-Sep	The Problem of Factions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Federalist</i> 10 & 51 	
18-Sep	Checks and Balances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Federalist</i> 47 & 48 	
20-Sep	Checks and Balances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Federalist</i> 69 & 78 	

Section II: Is This What Democracy Looks Like?

25-Sep	Tyranny of the Majority?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (CV) • Grimke, "Letter to Catharine E. Beecher" (CV) 	
27-Sep	Tyranny of the Majority?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calhoun, <i>Fort Hill Address</i>, pp. 367-402 	
02-Oct	States' Rights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calhoun, <i>Disquisition on Government</i>, pp. 3-28 	
04-Oct	States' Rights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calhoun, <i>Disquisition on Government</i>, pp. 29-54 	
09-Oct	States' Rights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calhoun, <i>Disquisition on Government</i>, pp. 55-78 	
11-Oct	Liberal Republicanism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln, "Fragment on the Constitution and the Union" (CV) • Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision in Springfield, Illinois" (CV) 	
16-Oct	Liberal Republicanism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (CV) • Lincoln, "First Inaugural" (CV) • Lincoln, "Second Inaugural" (CV) 	
18-Oct	Midterm	Midterm Exam	

Section III: Contemporary Rights and Responsibilities

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
23-Oct	Libertarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What Social Classes Owe to Each Other</i>, ch. 1-3 	
25-Oct	Libertarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sumner, <i>What Social Classes Owe to Each Other</i>, ch. 4-7 	
30-Oct	Libertarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sumner, <i>What Social Classes Owe to Each Other</i>, ch. 8-11 	
01-Nov	Progressivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croly, <i>Promise of American Life</i>, Ch. 1 	
06-Nov	Progressivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croly, <i>Promise of American Life</i>, Ch. 2 	

08-Nov	Progressivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croly, <i>Promise of American Life</i>, Ch. 4 	
13-Nov	Progressivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croly, <i>Promise of American Life</i>, Ch. 7 	
15-Nov	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (CV) • King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (CV) 	
20-Nov	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • King, Jr., "The Power of Non-Violence" (CV) • Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (CV) 	
22-Nov	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friedan, "The Feminine Mystique" (CV) • Schlafly, "The Power of the Positive Woman" (CV) • hooks, "Feminist Theory from Margin to Center" (CV) 	
06-Dec, 10:30AM – 1:00PM	Final Exam	Final Exam	