

POSC204 (Political Thought) syllabus, Spring 2016

Course description and goals

This course is designed to further your ability to think critically about fundamental issues in political thought. We will examine a wide variety of texts, from the works of Sophocles, Plato, and Aristotle to the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Václav Havel. As we explore these works, we will consider such themes as the nature of human beings (and what is good for them), the nature of law and justice, freedom, the relationship between law and conscience, and appropriate forms of government. Throughout the semester, we'll make use of some of the scholarly literature on the major works we read.

In addition to gaining a working familiarity with key texts in the Western tradition of political philosophy, students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills throughout the semester:

- asking good questions about the texts we read
- generating discussion questions and leading class discussions about those texts
- writing clear, thoughtful essays exploring various aspects of our readings
- locating and evaluating sources to increase understanding of our texts
- making use of appropriate tools (e.g. Google Drive, Zotero) for research, writing, and communication¹

This course fulfills Sophia LO1 outcomes for Philosophical Worldviews:

- A Saint Mary's student identifies and understands significant features of and developments in philosophical traditions concerning the nature of knowledge, the nature of reality, and the nature of the good.
- A Saint Mary's student analyzes and compares philosophical views.

Students fulfill these outcomes through close reading of, discussion of, and writing about the texts we read during the course of the semester. As we move through these texts, it will become clear that Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas (for example) have views about the nature of human beings and the limits of human knowledge that differ significantly from those of Machiavelli or Rousseau. Together we will explore the underlying assumptions that, at least in part, to these differing views.

- A Saint Mary's student thinks philosophically about her interactions in the world.

¹Those interested in why I ask students to make use of digital tools in what is in many ways a very traditional course might wish to read this post from ProfHacker.

- A Saint Mary's student raises questions on philosophical issues pertaining to the development of her own worldview.

Students fulfill these outcomes by actively engaging with the texts we read together. They have the opportunity to do this in a formal way through writing assignments which encourage them to consider their own views on important issues in political philosophy in light of the readings.

This course also fulfills the Sophia LO2 outcomes for the Critical Thinking Seminar:

- A Saint Mary's student evaluates and formulates claims about issues, ideas, artifacts, or events using critical thinking methods that are appropriate to the discipline of the seminar.

Students fulfill this outcome through careful reading and discussion of the texts we read, and by thoughtfully engaging those texts in the writing assignments.

- A Saint Mary's student demonstrates basic information literacy skills as listed in the information literacy sub-outcomes. (She is able to determine how much and what kind of information she needs, locate that information, evaluate its suitability, and use it to accomplish her purpose.)

Students fulfill this outcome by completing the annotated bibliography and article review assignments.

- A Saint Mary's student demonstrates effective oral communication in presentational or interactive contexts.

Students fulfill this outcome by preparing and leading class discussion.

- A Saint Mary's student develops and organizes written arguments.

Students fulfill this outcome by completing the essay assignments and the article review.

When and where we meet

Section 2 meets every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in from 10:00 - 10:50 am. Section 1 meets the same days from 11:00 - 11:50 am. Both sections meet in Madeleva 206.

Contact information and office hours

The most reliable way to contact me is by email at acavende@saintmarys.edu. Please note that I do not check email on Sundays — ever. I sometimes check on Saturdays, but not regularly. With those exceptions, I make every effort to respond to within 48 hours. If it's been longer than that and you haven't heard back, please don't hesitate to check with me to be sure I received your message.

I'm also reachable by phone. My office phone is 574-284-4430.

My office hours are 1:00 - 3:00 pm Mondays and Wednesdays, and 10:00 - 11:00 am Thursdays. If those times don't fit your schedule, we can certainly make other arrangements, so please don't hesitate to ask. You're also welcome to just stop by the office, and if it's a good time, we can talk then. If it's not a good time I'll be honest and tell you that, but I'll also pull up my calendar so that we can arrange a time that does work for both of us.

Books needed

You need only one book for this course:

Morgan, Michael L, ed. 2011. *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*. 5th ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

This book contains all of the readings you'll need for the semester, with the exception of the King reading, an essay by Václav Havel, and several journal articles, all of which are available on the open web or in the College's electronic holdings.

Paperback copies of Morgan's anthology are available in the campus bookstore. The book is also available in electronic formats (e.g., Kindle, Nook). If you prefer an electronic edition to print, that's fine.

If you already have copies of the works we'll be reading (consult the calendar information below) or wish to obtain copies from online sources, feel free to use them instead of the Morgan anthology.

Assignments and grading

There are two exams in this course: a midterm and a final, each of which is worth 150 points.

In addition to the two exams, there are five major assignments:

- Two essays (approx. 1250 – 1750 words): 150 points each
- An article review: 150 points

- An entry in an annotated bibliography created by the entire class: 100 points
- Preparing discussion questions and leading class discussion. You will work in teams of two or three for this assignment; teams will consult with me prior to the class session for which their discussion is scheduled.: 150 points

That makes for a total of 1000 points for the semester. Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- A = 930 – 1000
- A- = 900 – 929
- B+ = 880 – 899
- B = 830 – 879
- B- = 800 – 829
- C+ = 780 – 799
- C = 730 – 779
- C- = 700 – 729
- D = 600 – 699
- F = < 600

Due dates

Exams will be given on the dates indicated on the course calendar.

All assignments are due on the date indicated on the course calendar.

Final exam

The final exam for this course (which is not cumulative and is weighted the same as the midterm) is scheduled for **7:30-9:30 pm on May 3, 2016**.

Course calendar

Below, you'll find our calendar for the semester's work.

This calendar is public, so if you're using Google Calendar, you can click the button to subscribe; if you do, any changes made here will automatically be pushed to your account. In any case, please be sure to check the calendar regularly. Though I've planned the semester out carefully, sometimes the unexpected occurs, so there may be some minor changes along the way.

A Google Calendar for the course is embedded in the web version of the syllabus.

Week	Content
1 (Jan. 11-15)	Introduction, Sophocles' <i>Antigone</i>

Week	Content
2 (Jan. 18-25)	Sophocles; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; Scholarship
3 (Jan. 25-29)	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
4 (Feb. 1-5)	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
5 (Feb. 8-12)	Plato, <i>Republic</i> ; Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> . Essay #1 due Feb. 8.
6 (Feb. 15-19)	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> ; Aquinas, <i>On Kingship</i>
7 (Feb. 22-26)	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> , I-II, Q. 90, 91, 93, 94
8 (Feb. 29-Mar. 4)	Aquinas/review/mid-term exam. Article review or annotated bib due Feb. 29.
9 (Mar. 14-18)	Taking stock, Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i>
10 (Mar. 21-23)	Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> , Good Friday
11 (Mar. 28-Apr. 1)	Easter Monday, Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i>
12 (Apr. 4-8)	Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i>
13 (Apr. 11-15)	Rousseau, <i>On the Social Contract</i> ; Havel, “The Power of te Powerless.” Essay #2 due Apr. 11.
14 (Apr. 18-22)	Havel. Article review or annotated bib due Apr. 22.
15 (Apr. 25-27)	TBA, wrap up and review

Attendance

Regular attendance is expected. When you miss class, you not only miss out on your colleagues’ contributions to class — you also deprive them of yours. Excessive absences may have an adverse impact on your final grade for the course.

If you are ill or have some other serious reason for missing class, please let me know ahead of class time if possible, but in any case as soon as you reasonably can.

Class cancellation

If I need to cancel a class due to illness or some other serious reason, I will make every effort to notify you prior to class time. I will email the class and post a notice to the blog, if at all possible, and I will also try to arrange to have a notice of the cancellation posted outside the classroom.

If I am not in the classroom and you have received no notice of a cancellation, please wait ten minutes before concluding that something has happened and I’ve been unable to inform you.

Technology policy

Devices:

The use of electronic devices is not only permitted in this course — in a few instances, it will be necessary.² I do not ordinarily police your device use in class, even when those devices aren't needed for a specific class activity. I do, however, ask that you be courteous. Please be sure that your mobile phone is set to silent (not vibrate, which can actually be quite loud, especially if the phone happens to be in the same bag as your books), and that your use of any devices does not become a distraction to yourself or others. (Bear in mind that anyone sitting near you can probably see what's on your computer or tablet screen. Also, remember that multitasking while maintaining focus is *really* difficult. If you're texting, shopping, or catching up on personal email, you're probably missing a lot of what's going on in class. Presumably you enrolled in this course because you have at least *some* interest in the subject matter; why distract yourself from learning about something you're interested in?)

I reserve the right to request that you put your device(s) away if I get the sense that you're not paying attention or that you're distracting those around you. At times, I might ask *everyone* to set devices aside to help us all focus on a specific task.

Email:

Email is the official means of communication at Saint Mary's College, and all official communications from the College will be sent to your saintmarys.edu address. It is therefore *essential* that you check that address on a regular basis (I would strongly recommend you check it *daily* during the work week). If you fail to do so, you may miss vital information.

Please use your saintmarys.edu address for all communications regarding this course. (If you have other email addresses and would like to be able to check them all in one central location, please see me. I can make a few suggestions about ways to do that.)

What you may expect when you email me:

I check my email at least once or twice a day during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, and I will ordinarily respond within 48 hours of receiving a message. If it's been longer than that and you haven't received a response, please follow up; it's possible that the message didn't get through for some reason.

I do *not* check my email on Sundays, and only occasionally on Saturdays, so I can't guarantee that I'll see any messages sent later than Friday afternoon prior to late Monday morning.

²This does not mean that personal ownership of such a device is required for this course. We have access to a number of computer labs on campus, and can arrange to have our class meetings in one of them when needed.

Academic honesty

Academic inquiry always involves conversation. Sometimes that conversation is verbal; at other times, it takes written form. Whatever form it takes, academic conversation at its best enables us all to learn from each other. The proper citation of one's sources is an important way of engaging conversation partners who aren't physically present. Plagiarism makes use of our conversation partners' ideas without acknowledging their contribution; it robs them of their voice.

It is this failure to acknowledge and involve conversation partners that makes plagiarism the most serious academic offense a student or faculty member can commit. It is the passing off of another's ideas or words as one's own; in effect, it is theft. It also undercuts the trust that is essential in any community of learning. The plagiarist shows disrespect not only for those from whom she steals and for those to whom she presents the plagiarized work, but also for herself. She is, in effect, saying that she is incapable of doing her own work, or that she is too lazy to acknowledge others involved in the conversation.

For all of these reasons, Saint Mary's College maintains an academic honesty policy, which can be found on pp. 48-49 of the 2015-2016 Academic Guide for First-Year Students. Accordingly, I treat incidents of plagiarism very seriously. At minimum, a student whose work is discovered to be plagiarized will fail the assignment in question. Truly egregious or repeated instances of plagiarism may result in failure for the course, not just the assignment. In keeping with the College's policy, I will report instances of plagiarism to Academic Affairs.

We will be working together this semester to ensure that everyone in the class is aware of what plagiarism is and is familiar with how to document sources correctly. (Problems with citation style and/or formatting do not constitute plagiarism. I will point out such problems and help you correct them, but as long as, when you've borrowed words or ideas from someone else, you indicate that and point to the source from which you've borrowed, you have not plagiarized.) Both our own Writing Center and the OWL at Purdue are excellent resources, and can provide you with assistance in developing your writing skills as well as assistance with proper documentation. If ever you are in doubt as to whether your paper contains plagiarized elements, please ask prior to submitting it. Given reasonable advance notice, I am always happy to go over a draft with you, and to answer any questions you might have about how to cite your sources properly. Never let the pressures of academia lead you into dishonesty. Character, self-respect, and the enjoyment of good conversation are far more important than what may seem more immediately obvious measures of success.

Accessibility

I do my best to make all materials in this course accessible to all students. If you have trouble accessing any course materials, please let me know as soon as possible so we can work together to resolve the situation.

Any student who is eligible for accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make her needs known to me and should also contact Iris Giamo, in the Disability Resource Office located in Madeleva Hall Room 103C (x4262) or e-mail her at igiamo@saintmarys.edu for an appointment to review documentation and arrange for appropriate and legal accommodations. Students who suspect they may have a disability are also encouraged to contact the Disabilities Resource Office.