

Power, Justice, and the State

Political Science 112 (3 credits; no prerequisites)

Fall Semester 2023

meets 9:40-11:10 TTh in Sage 4221

Office Hours: M 3-4:30; Th 1:30-3:00

or by appointment

Faculty Support: Dr. Tracy Slagter (slagtert@uwosh.edu)

Professor David Siemers

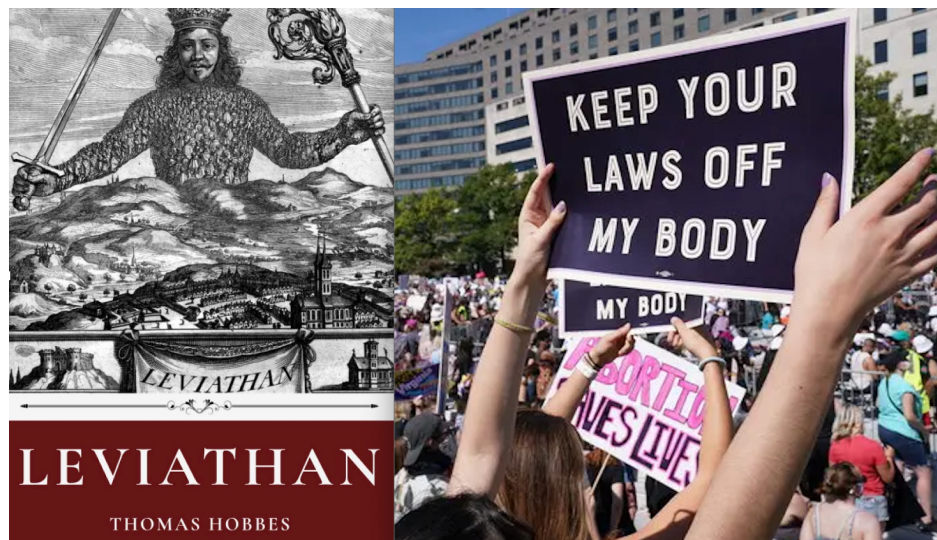
Office: Sage Hall 4622

Phone: 424-3456 (PS office)

email: siemers@uwosh.edu

Peer Mentor: Emma Sullivan

email: sullie64@uwosh.edu



Course Description: Power, Justice, and the State invites you to consider critical themes of public interest. Why do we have a state? What should the state do and why? What should it not do and why should it not? State power may obviously be used for ill, but when and how can it be used for good? Does citizenship create obligations about how to treat others as well as benefits for citizens? We will consider several major schools of thought about this, which we call theories of justice. We will discuss the strengths and shortcomings of these theories in practice, looking at various arenas of state involvement.

Signature Question: How do people understand and engage in community life?

Essential Learning Objectives for the 3 credit Quest I (Society) course:

- develop civic knowledge
- evaluate theories, including their benefits, their assumptions, and their difficulties
- engage in critical and creative thinking

Subject Matter: This class is an introduction to thinking systematically and ethically about politics. We will be considering some real-life and imagined dilemmas and aim to reason our way through to various options about how to approach them. Along the way we will consider how to organize society in ways that have been discussed by interested parties for decades and even centuries.

Reading Material: In some college courses you will be expected to read a lot; in others, not at all. In this course I am shooting for a manageable amount of reading, with the clear expectation that you will do it before class on the day it is assigned. You do not have to purchase any books or a course packet. Our readings will either be on line, as noted below, or posted to Canvas.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your grade consists of five components, each worth 20% of your final course grade. I will give you a letter grade for each component. The letter grade corresponds to the grade point typically assigned to them (A=4.0, A-=3.7, B+=3.3, B=3.0 etc.). To calculate your final grade I add the total points that you earned, then divide that by the total number of assignments. I'll be happy to talk with you about how you are doing in the class at any time. The five components are as follows and each of them is outlined after the course schedule:

Attendance
Participation in Class
Seven Short Essays
A Midterm Exam
A Final Exam

Daily Readings, Assignments, and Topics for Discussion

September 7 welcome and meet each other; the class and syllabus (your learning contract); what is political theory?

Part I: Ethical Dilemmas—What to Do?

September 12 ethical dilemma #1: What Taylor Swift has to do with political theory
reading: Bruni, "How to get the Most out of College" (Canvas)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/opinion/college-students.html>

September 14 ethical dilemma #2: "Public goods," their use, utility, and abuse
reading: none
Short Essay #1: What I want to get out of College and why I am here

September 19 ethical dilemma #3: What are the limits of free speech?
field trip to Student Success Center
reading: "Speech on Campus" found at <https://www.aclu.org/documents/speech-campus>

September 21 ethical dilemma #4: Do we have obligations to future generations?
reading: none
Essay #2: What will future generations hate about our generation and why?

Part II: Liberalism, the Prevailing Public Philosophy

- September 26** liberalism's origins and major tenets
Reading: Talisse, "Liberalism in Political Philosophy" pp. 21-34
- September 27** Constitution Day: Crisis of Engagement—Why we Need More Speech on Campus
6:00 Reeve Union 227 (Ballroom)
- September 28** three major variations of liberalism; computers in the classroom
reading: "For Better Learning in College..." found at
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/>
- October 3** liberalism, option #1: positive-rights liberalism (adding economic and social rights to political and civil rights)
reading: the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" found at:
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- October 5** positive-rights liberalism, continued:
reading: McFarland, "Modern Human Rights" (Canvas)
Essay #3: What are the benefits and drawbacks of positive-rights liberalism?
- October 10** liberalism, option #2: utilitarianism, the "greatest good for the greatest number"
reading: "Introduction to Utilitarianism" (Oxford University) found at:
<https://www.utilitarianism.net/introduction-to-utilitarianism>
and Roberts and Sutch, *An Introduction to Political Thought*, pp. 153-161 find on line at
Polk library website
- October 12** utilitarianism, continued; thoughts on your major
view podcast: Michael Green TedxTalk on the Social Progress Index
https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_green_what_the_social_progress_index_can_reveal_about_your_country?language=en
reading: "Students...don't Pick Useless Majors" found at:
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/students-at-most-colleges-dont-pick-useless-majors/>
Essay #4: what are the benefits and drawbacks of utilitarianism?
- October 17** liberalism, option #3: libertarianism, minimal government, maximal freedom
Reading: Mill, *On Liberty*, chapter 1
- October 19** libertarianism, continued
reading: Friedman, "The Role of Government in a Free Society" (Canvas)
Essay #5: What are the benefits and drawbacks of libertarianism?
- *6:15 PM speaker Marie Yovanovich**, former Ambassador to Ukraine, Reeve 227*
with optional review for exam afterward
- October 24** **Midterm Exam**
- October 26** free day! (in exchange for outside lecture attendance)

Part III: Alternatives to Liberalism: Helpful or Not, Thick or Thin?

- October 31** alternative 1: conservatism—an appreciation for culture and tradition over “rationalism”
reading: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Conservatism,” Introduction and parts 1.1 through 1.3 found at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conservatism/>
- November 2** revisit what makes for success in college
reading: Cuseo, “What all First-Year Students Should Know”
- November 7** alternative 2: communitarianism—the long quest for greater community
Reading: Tannenbaum, “Aristotle—Endorsing Community”
- November 9** communitarianism, continued—a modern example
reading: “The Responsive Communitarian Platform” (Canvas)
Essay #6: Which alternative/addition to liberalism is more attractive, conservatism or communitarianism, and why?
- November 14** Alternative 3: feminism—taking lived experience seriously and empowering the disempowered
reading: Burkett and Brunell, “Feminism” (Britannica)
- November 16** Alternative 4: Marxist socialism—a theory to end social division and economic competition
reading: Roberts and Sutch, chapter 5 through page 142 “Owen and Marx”
- November 21** class discussion: are the alternatives to liberalism helpful or not, thick or thin?; college so far—what have I learned, what have I learned about how to learn
reading: none
Essay #7: which alternative/addition to liberalism is more attractive, feminism or Marxist socialism, and why?
- November 23** No class: Thanksgiving

Part IV: Return to Ethical Dilemmas—What to Do?

- November 28** thinking about racial justice
reading: Coates “The Case for Reparations” parts 1 through 5
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- November 30** thinking about racial justice, continued
reading: Coates “The Case for Reparations” part 6 to the end (see link above)
Essay #8: Which theory or theories of justice might be applied to the challenges of racial justice in the US and how?
- December 5** medical care in the US
reading: none
- December 7** obligations to animals and nature
reading: Regan, “The Case for Animal Rights” (Canvas)

December 12 do we have obligations to people beyond our borders?; review and course conclusion assignment: watch video “Nike Sweatshops: Beyond the Swoosh” found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5uYCWVfuPQ>

December 14 Final Exam

* Note that there are two **co-curricular events** that you will be expected to attend. This is a requirement in all Quest I classes, and it helps to acquaint you with the large number of events held here at UW Oshkosh every semester. The first of these is scheduled for the evening of September 27th and the second for the evening of October 19th. Your Peer Mentor Emma Sullivan will also be offering optional events that she would like you to join her in.

Attendance: Professors have different attendance policies. I expect you to attend class and I record attendance. Why? Because you came to college to take classes and learn stuff (along with other reasons, I am sure); attendance and grades are strongly positively correlated. It is good to get in (or stay) in the habit of attending class. Some professors say, “well, you are an adult, so you make your own decision about whether to go to class or not.” That’s true in this class as well, it’s just that as an adult there are consequences to your decision not to attend.

If you are ill, experience a family emergency, observe a religious holiday, or you are participating at a University-sponsored team event it is University policy that your teacher must and will excuse you from attendance, understanding that you are still responsible for the material covered that day and any make up work. Please let me know if you are in one of those situations before class.

If you have from 0 or 1 unexcused absence you will receive an A in attendance, from there, every unexcused absence lowers your grade by one increment (2 absences = A-; 3 absences = B+ etc.). Choose to do well here.

Participation: You may participate in class in a variety of ways: ask questions, make comments, respond to a peer, work actively in groups, display an interest in learning, see your teacher during office hours. I want you to participate actively; don’t consider college a spectator sport! Talking in front of others can be a challenge, but face that challenge now. Most of you will need to participate in conversations on the job with colleagues (and in life!); this is a time to practice that skill.

Asking questions about what you may not understand is just as important as making a point. Attitude matters as well; learning can be fun, but even if and when it isn’t, you should respect your peers and try to appreciate what professors have spent a lifetime studying and try to get you interested in. You can ask me how you are doing in this part of the grade anytime. This grade, in the end, is a judgment call by me, but I have good judgment, because I know who you are and will know what you have added to the class conversation and dialogue.

Short Essays: You will write 7 short essays of a single-spaced page (of 8 total opportunities—you get to skip one of these essay assignments). Most pertain to your reading materials and ask you to formulate a well-reasoned view of it, but the first one will acquaint me with what your hopes are for college. A response paper should be at least three significant paragraphs in length, totaling about one full single-spaced page.

These papers are due at 8AM on the day of class they are assigned. Submit in the Canvas dropbox. I comment on/grade your papers on Canvas.

Papers will be graded either ++, +, 0, or – (this last grade is only for papers not handed in)
++ a well-written response that shows you have read and thought carefully about the assigned material and have carefully considered the question posed;
+ knowledge of concepts introduced is present but less than fully specific with some potential errors; the paper is moderately successful in arguing a point
0 a poorly executed response with little relationship to the assigned reading material; the essay does not effectively address the question posed in the assignment

At the end of the semester I simply add up how many + you have and your grade is determined by that: A = 13 or 14; A- = 12; B+ 11; B = 10 etc. If you hand in your reaction after the deadline you cannot receive a ++ grade.

#1 Sept. 14	What I want to get out of College and why I am here
#2 Sept. 21	What will future generations hate about our generation and why?
#3 Oct. 5	What are the benefits and drawbacks of positive-rights liberalism?
#4 Oct. 12	What are the benefits and drawbacks of utilitarianism?
#5 Oct. 19	What are the benefits and drawbacks of libertarianism?
#6 Nov. 9	Which alternative/addition to liberalism is more attractive, conservatism or communitarianism, and why?
#7 Nov. 21	Which alternative/addition to liberalism is more attractive, feminism or Marxist socialism, and why?
#8 Nov. 30	Which theory or theories of justice might be applied to the challenges of racial justice in the US and how?

Here is our department's tutorial on **writing in Political Science** that you should familiarize yourself with:
https://uwosh.edu/politicalscience/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2016/04/Writing_Tips.pdf

Exams: There are two exams in this course that are scheduled for October 24th and December 14th. They will cover all the material we go over during the period under review. I will use a variety of assessment mechanisms on the test, including essay, multiple choice, and identification of terms. You have an open note format. Be advised that open note exams increase the difficulty of tests, because they change the expectation for learning, away from whatever you can cram into your brain on any given day, toward all of what we have gone over. Your diligence in taking notes when reading and in class correlates with higher test grades.

The University Studies Program and Liberal Arts Education

The USP is UW Oshkosh's general education program. All accredited Universities have general education, consisting of an array of "breadth courses" outside of a major. The purpose of the USP is to ensure that you get an education that acquaints you with the world, science, literature, writing, and the arts in a deeper way than you did in high school. This is what is a "liberal arts" education. A liberal arts background makes you more versatile and well-rounded, with one of the benefits being that you are more desirable to employers.

In three "Quest" classes, you will examine up to three different questions. The question at issue in this Quest I class is "how do people understand and engage in community life?" All Quest I and Quest II classes are paired with either a writing class or speaking class. Both classes are small in size and together constitute a "learning community," as you take the two classes with the same group. Learning beyond your major is important. It makes you more versatile and knowledgeable; it helps develop skills that a single major or concentration can't. This Quest I course's 3 credits count toward the "Explore" Society requirement.

Additional Policies and Information

On Writing Writing well is an important skill, one that will help you succeed and advance in almost any profession. Writing well allows people to know what you think and for you to make a persuasive case for your point of view. This is a lifetime endeavor and I want to help you to improve your writing, no matter the level of proficiency that you are at now. You will be writing several short papers for me. I would be very happy to work with you on your writing outside of class if you seek to improve. Just ask.

If you quote or paraphrase anyone's argument you must cite their work (more on citations as you prepare for the first paper). Any outside sources you use on your paper should be reputable and cited.

Expectations for a Good Class: The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom experience, and we take your feedback very seriously. If you have concerns about anything related to this course, assignments, or teaching method, you are encouraged to first speak with your instructor directly. If you are not comfortable speaking with the instructor, you are invited to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Tracy Slagter. She can be reached at slagtert@uwosh.edu. Should she be unable to resolve your concerns, she will guide you to appropriate resources within the College of Letters and Science. Dr. Slagter will be joining us occasionally to help us reflect on certain matters pertaining to college and the class.

The **APSA Style Manual** is an important reference. On pp. 37-41 it covers in-text citations and starting on p. 42 it describes how to write bibliographical entries: <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/>

Office Hours: **These are times professors set aside to meet with students in their office.** I will be in my office the hours listed at the top of the syllabus. If you have a schedule conflict with my office hours send me a message and we can work things out, including finding an alternative time. There are other times I will be in, but be advised that professors do a lot of work at home, away from their campus office. *The main point to remember is that I am available to you. This is a great way to get to know your teachers...they are typically pretty interesting people and they want to be helpful.*

Expectations for Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Graded assignments are designed to work on these items. Thus, to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence of a college-educated person all graded work is to be your own. When you are directed to work alone, an assignment or test must be done by you, its primary ideas are to be your own, and any outside materials should be dealt with properly (quoted when using someone's words, and cited when quoting or referencing them in any other way). When your teacher directs you to work in teams, the work is to be done by the team. More information can be found here: <https://uwosh.edu/politicalscience/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/08/Academic-Honesty.pdf>

Peer Mentor: Every Quest I class comes with a peer mentor, an upperclass UW Oshkosh student who is here to help introduce you to the campus and its resources. **Emma Sullivan** is your Peer Mentor. She will regularly attend class on

Tuesdays, and lead informational class activities and is available to you by email or appointment. It helps to have an experienced student to talk to, and your conversations with Emma about the class or anything else are confidential.

Civic Knowledge and Civic Engagement: Civic knowledge consists of an awareness and understanding of the various political and social processes that impact the nature and quality of life in local, state, national, or global communities. It also encompasses the cultivation of skills that may be useful in public life, like effective communication and ethical reasoning. Civic engagement means having an appreciation for and applying the values gained from civic knowledge in real world settings, directed at improving the quality of life in the communities of which one is a part. Civic knowledge and civic engagement emphasize learning, reflection and action in order to create better communities.

Early Alert: This report will indicate if you have academic performance or attendance problems and, if so, will help you to remedy these issues. It is common for students to be unaware of their academic performance in classes or even overestimate their performance. This is a check, offered during Week 5, that will help you know if you are on track for passing this class (and the others you are in).

Learning Outcomes and Core Abilities:

- know the major tenets of key theories of justice and evaluate them analytically
- articulate why thinking about justice is important
- apply concepts of justice to real-world situations
- constructively respond to and critique the work of peers

Barring documented necessity, the tests must be taken at the scheduled time. If you have trouble meeting this expectation, please talk to me.

Classroom electronics policy: Using a computer to take notes is tempting, but studies show it is less effective than taking notes by hand. I strongly recommend that you take hand written notes. Cell phones should be put away and not accessed during the class. If you need to use your phone for some reason, try to inform me (or more generically) your teacher beforehand. Your teacher will typically understand and then you can slip out of the room when you have to.

Political Science majors (and prospective majors): You should be taking Political Methodology (PS 245) in your sophomore year, or, if you cannot, in the first semester of your junior year at the latest. PS 245 is a prerequisite for our capstone course Political Analysis (PS 401) and cannot be taken concurrently with PS 245. You should save your graded work from this class and others in the major, as you compile a portfolio of your written work in PS 401.

Disability Accommodations: It is the policy and practice of UW Oshkosh to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion, please notify me. You are also welcome to contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 920-424-3100 or dean1@uwosh.edu. For more information, visit the Services for Students with Disabilities website: <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/disability-services>.

Syllabus Changes: If any major changes are made to this schedule and these policies, I will announce them in a timely manner via your UW Oshkosh email account and post the revised syllabus on Canvas.

The following URL contains a description of students' consumer protection rights required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990: <https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/consumer-information/>