

**Introduction to Politics  
POLS 100-01, Fall 2014  
Syllabus (Revised 9/1/14)**

Professor Brian Smith

All Online: Course will be conducted via Canvas

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Office Hours: Monday 2:30-5:30 pm, Dickson 250

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to a wide variety of political dilemmas through a selection of films and texts. The class will center on a series of questions: What is the nature of justice? Can political institutions achieve it? What is political power for? What role do moral beliefs play in shaping our political life? Is truth or clarity in language important for politics? How ought we to understand America? By contributing to an online discussion, writing one short response essay per week, and completing a final exam, students will have the chance to ponder these questions.

**Course Goals**

Students will improve their ability to interpret texts as well as enhance their written and verbal expression. They will also refine their understanding of important issues in politics and various prominent attempts to grapple with them. Knowledge of these ideas and their consequences will help prepare students for more advanced courses in political science and other fields.

**Course Expectations**

*First and most importantly: Read this syllabus carefully. Clearly understanding the class requirements will save us all trouble later.*

I will outline each week's film, discussion board question, and the weekly short paper options below, but each week of the class starting with the first will proceed as follows.

In most weeks of the class, I will post a weekly power-point lecture by Monday evening each week of the course. The lecture will primarily focus on helping you consider the readings and some of the broader implications that flow from them and will not touch on the films (the online discussions, however, will focus most heavily on how the readings relate to them).

The discussion of each week's film and texts will open on Monday. While participation in these online discussions is optional (and worth extra credit), I suggest that if you plan on posting something, you do so early so that a conversation might take place. Every Friday but the last, one short paper of two pages will be due on Canvas in response to questions I post here in the syllabus and online. I will attempt to have written comments on your writing each week by Tuesday.

As this is an online class, timely and active participation on the discussion board each week will be important to refining your understanding of each text and thinking through the applications to the various films. In order to receive credit for participation online, on average, in order that it actually become a discussion forum rather than an isolated set of monologues, I ask that students make a minimum of one or two comments per week to the unfolding conversation. Thoughtful questions to others count as a form of participation. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Expect to be challenged, but look on it as an opportunity, not a threat.

Students should post arguments that directly reference the readings and films. In order to be prepared for this, you should take notes on the readings that identify key passages for discussion, or which you do not understand. With the possible exception of *Richard III*, the films should be self-explanatory, but much of our discussion will focus on relating them to the texts and the political problems they suggest. Under each class meeting, I have listed one or two questions designed to guide your reading of the texts in light of the films and which will appear on the discussion forum as a starting point.

Some additional observations about reading for the class: While the reading load for most weeks is not very heavy, these are not standard textbooks with bold lettering around every word you need to know. A casual reading or one undertaken with various distractions present will probably not get you very far. If you get confused, reread the passage, and if you still cannot make sense of the subject matter, raise your confusion as a question in the discussion forum or come to my office hours. Because of all this, you should probably allot at least an hour or two of focused attention per week to the readings (and of course watch the films I assign). If you fail to do this, your ability to follow the online discussion will be reduced and your chances of doing well on any of the writing assignments will be slim.

In terms of notes on the class readings, I recommend all students both mark up their books and take extensive notes with page references that essentially index the readings. You should type these up so that they are searchable. This is very time-consuming, but will benefit you tremendously both for the short papers I assign as well as the take-home final.

This syllabus is subject to change, but I will always provide advance notice both in class and via email. You can always find a copy of the most up-to-date syllabus on Canvas.

### **Assignments and Grading**

I will determine your grades using the following breakdown:

Weekly Essays:	60% (12 essays, 5% each)
Final Exam:	40%

Participation in the online discussions or coming to my office hours with questions can raise your final course grade by up to two + steps.

**Essay Assignment Instructions:**

Choose one of the options listed in each week of the syllabus and answer it in two double spaced pages (12 point font, double spaced). These are relatively serious questions and attempting them in less than two pages will not work. But do not exceed the two page limit either: I want this to be an exercise in practicing writing discipline as well and can give you comments in a timely fashion if the essays stay short. With that in mind, read the instructions below carefully.

You should not attempt to outline or laundry list every idea you have, rather choose one focused line of argumentation that brings a handful of the most important points you think support your case to bear on the subject. The best method of accomplishing this is to engage in a close reading of the text(s) and thought about the film – and marshal evidence from them to support your claims. Do not use any sources besides the texts assigned in this course.

Avoid expressing a direct judgment about the text unless I specifically ask for one. These essays demand careful textual analysis. I am looking for a sustained effort on your part in each to understand what these authors are saying and I am not at all interested in what you think about the merits or deficiencies of their arguments. So, unless I have specifically asked for your judgment about something in the question, do not waste the space and effort.

Cite both direct quotes and all specific references to the text. By this, I mean: each and every time you use or refer to a specific passage to help develop your essay, you must use a parenthetical in-text citation (author, page number) to tie this to the book. Failure to cite sources is plagiarism and will result in an automatic F on the assignment. Severe cases (any work simply copied without attribution) will be reported to the Dean of Students and result in an automatic final grade of F in the class.

I will mark down all essays that deviate from the formatting requirements, and that are under or over the page limit; part of what I am testing here is your clarity of thought, and whether you can determine what really bears on the subject at hand and what does not.

Yes, writing counts, so proofread your papers carefully. I will provide comments on grammar and style. If I ask you to see a writing tutor, please do so.

Each short essay will be due by 6 pm on Friday of each week via upload to Canvas, and will be worth 5% of your final grade in the class. There will be no revisions allowed. Late essays without verified medical excuse will be graded down one minus increment each day after the deadline. This means you have a maximum of ten days before the assignment automatically counts as an F. Failure to complete this or any other essay in the class in that time frame will result in a zero for this assignment, as well as a maximum of D- for your final course grade.

**Required Materials:**

Texts:

C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (HarperOne, 2001), ISBN: 9780060652944

Larry P. Arnn, *The Founders' Key* (Thomas Nelson, 2012), ISBN: 1595555765

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Harvey C. Mansfield trans. (University of Chicago Press, 1998), ISBN: 9780226500447

Kenneth Minogue, *Politics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1995), ISBN: 9780192853882

Films:

You will need to get access to the following films. I have confirmed that you can rent most of them on Amazon Prime. I think Netflix has all of them, but I am not sure which are available for instant download rather than just mail-and-return. Montclair State's library has most of them available to lend as well. I list them in order of viewing below:

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), with James Stewart and John Wayne

*1776* (1972), with William Daniels, Howard Da Silva and Ken Howard

*Dr. Strangelove* (1964), with Peter Sellers, George C. Scott and Sterling Hayden

*Richard III* (1955), with Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson

*The Wave (Die Welle)*, 2008), with Jürgen Vogel, Frederick Lau and Max Riemelt

*Advise and Consent* (1962), with Franchot Tone, Lew Ayres and Henry Fonda

*Conspiracy* (2001), with Kenneth Branagh, Colin Firth, and Stanley Tucci

*Equilibrium* (2002), with Christian Bale, Emily Watson, and Taye Diggs

*The Stepford Wives* (1975 – be sure to get this one and not the more comedic Nicole Kidman one from the 90's), with Katharine Ross, Paula Prentiss and Peter Masterson

*John Adams*, Parts I and II (2008), with Paul Giamatti and Laura Linney

*Lincoln* (2010), with Daniel Day-Lewis

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), with James Stewart, Jean Arthur and Claude Rains

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## **Course Schedule and Readings**

All readings not in the four texts can be found on Canvas under “Files” or are available via web links below.

### **Week 1 (9/3-9/5): On Reading and Writing**

Read: This document (carefully)  
J. Budziszewski, “Guide to Analytical Outlining”  
James Madison, *Federalist* 10, in Arnn, *The Founders’ Key*, pp. 160-168, or if you don’t have it yet, the text is online at:  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/federalist-no-10/>

*Please read the Budziszewski article alongside the example he uses (Federalist 10). This should give you a preliminary idea of how you need to approach serious texts like those I will be introducing in this class. You can outline this way or not, but please take the readings seriously.*

### **Week 2 (9/8-9/12): What Happens without the State?**

Watch: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*  
Read: Minogue, *Politics*, Chs. 1-4, pp. 1-33  
Marini, “Western Justice: John Ford and Sam Peckinpah on the Defense of the Heroic”

#### Canvas Discussion Question:

Minogue describes the origins of political science from the relatively distant past and how different political foundings shape later political orders. What do you think he would have to say about the American West as we see it depicted in *Shinbone* and surrounding territories?

#### Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 9/12):

- 1) Is Marini correct to argue that for a real community to emerge in *Shinbone*, both Doniphon and Valance have to leave? Why or why not?
- 2) By any modern understanding, *Shinbone* lacks a sovereign. What are some of the consequences of this that the readings suggest?

Week 3 (9/15-9/19): On the American Founding

Watch: *1776*

Read: Minogue, *Politics*, Chs. 5-6 and 8-10, pp. 34-51 and 61-85  
U.S. Declaration of Independence, in Arnin, *The Founders' Key*, pp. 127-132

Canvas Discussion Question:

To what degree does the depiction of Congress' deliberations and the text of the Declaration reflect what Minogue sees as the foundations of the modern state?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 9/19):

- 1) How does modern politics as Minogue describes it differ from the kind of activity depicted in *1776*?
- 2) In his description of our political circumstances, does Minogue leave much hope for the prospect of revolutionary activity like that we see in *1776*?

Week 4 (9/22-9/26): On International Relations and the Concept of Deterrence

Watch: *Dr. Strangelove*

Read: Minogue, *Politics*, Chs. 7 and 11-13, pp. 52-60 and 86-111  
John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War"

Canvas Discussion Question:

What does the film suggest to you about the assumptions that drive the kind of balance of power politics Mearsheimer and Minogue endorse?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 9/26):

- 1) How do nuclear weapons and the problems that come with them that *Dr. Strangelove* depicts change the calculations that Minogue argues rulers always make?
- 2) After watching the film, do you think Mearsheimer is right in his claim that we should miss the Cold War? Why or why not?

Week 5 (9/29-10/3): How Liberalism Ends and Machiavellian Politics Begin

Watch: *The Wave (Die Welle)*

Read: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Dedicatory Letter and Chs. 1-11, pp. 3-47

Canvas Discussion Questions:

Is despotism (and fascism) anti-political in the sense Minogue used in Chapter 1 of his *Very Short Introduction*? Is Machiavelli against politics in that sense as well? To what degree does Rainer's classroom experiment aim at the end of liberal politics?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 10/3):

- 1) To what degree does Rainer's fascism follow Machiavellian precepts?
- 2) In what ways would a true Machiavellian blame Rainer for the outcome of his experiment? Why?

Week 6 (10/6-10/10): Political Maneuvering and the Use of Power

Watch: *Advise and Consent*

Read: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chs. 12-18, pp. 48-71

Canvas Discussion Questions:

How does Machiavelli's concern with the politics of legitimate succession bear upon the events of this film? Obviously Machiavelli's politics are more violent than a Senate confirmation hearing, but in what ways can we use him to understand this process?

Short Essay Topics (due 10/10):

- 1) Senator Van Ackerman seems to believe that the end of securing Leffingwell's nomination to Secretary of State justifies his blackmail scheme. What might Machiavelli say about this maneuver?
- 2) Senator Cooley calls Leffingwell an "alien voice." Does Machiavelli give us any insight into the nature of such ideological or moral divisions within a polity?

Week 7 (10/13-10/17): Machiavellianism's Success and Failure

Watch: *Richard III*

Read: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chs. 19-25, pp. 71-105

Canvas Discussion Questions:

We can view *Richard III* as Shakespeare's attempt to critique Machiavelli's worldview. Develop an argument about this, and address the following questions: What does Shakespeare find most abhorrent in Machiavelli's thinking? How do the events of the play support your claim?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 10/17):

- 1) What differences in moral vision do you see between Shakespeare and Machiavelli?
- 2) To what extent does Richard's early conduct line up with a Machiavellian ethos? How does he depart from it?

Week 8 (10/20-10/24): Language and Politics

Watch: *Conspiracy*  
Read: Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"  
Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-26

Canvas Discussion Question:

If we follow both Orwell and Lewis, why is it important that the Nazis avoided using words that clarified rather than obscured the meaning of their discussion?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 10/24):

- 1) Comment on the significance of the word "evacuate" in light of Orwell's essay.
- 2) Why does Lewis fear that intellectual judgment without sentiment is dangerous? In what ways does that danger bear out in *Conspiracy*?

Week 9 (10/27-10/31): Dystopian Control and the Noble Emotions

Watch: *Equilibrium*  
Read: Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, Ch. 2, pp. 27-51  
Hadley Arkes, "The Natural Law Challenge"

Canvas Discussion Questions:

*Equilibrium* combines two interesting problems: first, a dystopia where the state labels *all* emotions as the enemy; and second, the film presents us with the central problem of totalitarian dictatorship – once the state has transformed the citizenry, how can they appeal to concepts of morality strong enough to justify and sustain revolt? Comment on these elements of the film in light of *Abolition of Man* and Arkes' essay.

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 10/31):

- 1) *Equilibrium* suggests that a future state might grow suspicious of all emotion. What role does Lewis believe emotion must have in order for it to become a danger to totalitarian rule?
- 2) How might natural lawyers criticize *Equilibrium*'s despotic regime?

Week 10 (11/3-11/7): Are the Suburbs Really That Bad?

Watch: *The Stepford Wives*  
Read: Lewis, *Abolition of Man*, Ch. 3

Canvas Discussion Questions:

Is the ultimate abolition of man our control of our lives with the assistance of artificial intelligence? How might Lewis respond to the film?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 11/7):

- 1) Short of actually chemically-modifying people, suburban life in Stepford starts out looking quite nice for the characters of the film. Why does Lewis suggest we tend to seek out relentless improvements (or what appear to be improvements) of the kind that the men of Stepford want in their domestic life?
- 2) Explain the men of Stepford in relation to Lewis' "controllers."

Week 11 (11/10-11/14): Back to the Declaration of Independence

Watch: *John Adams*, Parts I and II, "Join or Die" and "Independence"  
Read: Arnn, *The Founders' Key*, Chs. 1-4, pp. 3-48

Canvas Discussion Questions:

How does the moral and political opposition to the Declaration that we see in the miniseries differ from the opposition that Arnn claims exists today to its principles?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 11/14):

- 1) What relationship does Arnn propose between the Declaration and the Constitution?
- 2) According to Arnn moral grounding does the politics of the Declaration require?

Week 12 (11/17-11/21): Lincoln and the Declaration Fulfilled?

Watch: *Lincoln*  
Read: Arnn, *The Founders' Key*, Chs. 5-7, pp. 49-96  
Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," online at:  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/second-inaugural-address/>

Canvas Discussion Question:

The film depicts Lincoln at the end of the Civil War, attempting to manage its end. To what degree does the film's portrayal of Lincoln's struggles resonate with the political forces Arnn suggests were operating at the time?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 11/21):

- 1) How does Arnn explain the moral compromises the Founders' made that led to the Civil War?
- 2) What role does Arnn suggest Lincoln played in the restoration of the Declaration as a real force in American politics?

Week 13 (11/24-11/28): Thanksgiving Break, no assignments

Week 14 (12/1-12/5): Lincoln and the Perpetuation of Liberty

Watch: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Read: Arnn, *The Founders' Key*, Ch. 8 and Conclusion, pp. 97-123

Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," online at:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-perpetuation-of-our-political-institutions/>

Canvas Discussion Questions:

Both Lincoln and Mr. Smith seem to embrace the notion that the highest form of patriotism rests in allegiance to the Declaration and the Constitution. What challenges does Arnn suggest this always faces?

Short Essay Topics (due on Canvas by 12/5):

- 1) Lincoln suggests that Americans face a problem in that with the passing of the Revolutionary generation, we have to find a new way to defend our liberty. To what degree does Jefferson Smith embody his hope for the future? Why?
- 2) Lincoln and Arnn both identify certain characteristics of statesmanship. How does Senator Paine fall short of this ideal?

Week 15 (12/8-12/12): No new assignments, work on your final exam

Take-home final exams due via Canvas on Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup>

For the final exam, in no more than 6 pages (12 point font, double-spaced), please answer the following prompt:

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis argues that a "dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery" (73). Choose two of the films we viewed and discuss this quote in light of them. If these films seem to confirm Lewis' statement, explain why and how they do so. If you believe that these films depict an alternative, explain how he might respond to your criticism. You may use any of the other essays or books we read in the class to help develop your answer.

The instructions listed above on essay-writing apply here as well. Please reference them. I will post final course grades as soon as I grade the finals.