

Department of Political Science
Contemporary Social & Political Thought
POL381H1-F-LEC0101-20259
University of Toronto – Fall 2025

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Course Location: WW 126
Course Time: Mondays, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Please read this syllabus carefully. You are responsible for knowing all the information that it contains. I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus as the class is ongoing.

Course Description & Goals

This course covers the development of political thought from the twentieth century to the twenty-first century (1900-onwards), emphasizing the role of polity, epistemology (knowledge), European capitalism, social identity and the radical responses to these developments around the world. We will read canonical theorists such as Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt, as well as authors who have traditionally been excluded from courses in political theory like Martin Luther King Jr. Topics that will be covered throughout the semester include (but are not limited to) governance, individualism, race, gender, political economy and queerness.

Another task of this course will be to examine political theory as a sub-discipline within political science. What has traditionally differentiated political science from the other social science and humanities disciplines is the studying of power, i.e. the ways in which people construct society and divide up its resources and authority. Political theorists, in particular, made observations on the human condition, thinking and writing about what would be the ideal state (or society) to realize a particular goal or solve certain problems, particularly inequality. In other words, what is the purpose of reading texts that are thirty, fifty, or a hundred years old in the twenty-first century? Furthermore, what counts as political theory and who determines what is worthy of our attention and analysis?

While you will most likely not have to explain Marx to get a job after graduation (outside of academia that is), the purpose of reading these and the other assigned authors is to augment your critical thinking skills, have a sense of history about the origin of “modern/contemporary” values, culture, and norms, and to go beyond seeing politics in binary terms, e.g. good-evil, or liberal-conservative. Moreover, this course asks of you: what’s your role in the shaping, dare I say, shifting, of our contemporary political imagination? In this course, as we learn alongside each other, we hope to develop the following critical competencies:

1. **Core Communication** – in this course you will continue to improve your abilities to present diverse ideas, facts, and nuanced arguments in written and oral formats.
2. **Critical Thinking** – reading political theory requires analysis, creativity, evaluation, and application of previous knowledge and experience to the texts. It is those “a-ha!” moments after hours of intense reading and writing that will make this class enjoyable.

3. **Integration & Application of Knowledge** – a close reading of these texts will inevitably change your perception or ignite an interest in a different topic you had not considered before. The ultimate goal for this and all of your classes is that you will utilize your skills and abilities to make a difference in your community.
4. **Intellectual Depth** – this course provides an opportunity to explore a particular topic in profound analytical detail. This, of course, is a tremendous life skill to have and hone.
5. **Understanding Society & Culture** – the readings for this course were chosen to expose you to as many perspectives on controversial and undiscussed issues affecting human society, with the ultimate goal of making you a bolder and more nuanced thinker.
6. **Values & Ethics** – I hope a fundamental takeaway from this course is the ability to understand and articulate ethical viewpoints that differ from your own, as well as to deepen your own ethical holdings. Also, this course helps to provide you with a sense of the importance of values as a political concept and its implication on real-world politics.

Campus & Class Policies

Do not cheat. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. It is critical that you learn practices of intellectual honesty and academic integrity. Your assignments must reflect your own effort (or a group effort for team assignments). In situations where external sources are used, you must acknowledge your sources and add your own analysis. Otherwise, it will count as plagiarism. If you plagiarize or cheat, the minimum penalty is an F on the assignment; other penalties could include an F for the course and/or suspension. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the relevant adjudicating office. Expectations for academic integrity and student conduct are described in detail here:

<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2025>

Moreover, please be respectful of others (especially when you disagree with them!) and please let me know what I can do to make this class a more pleasant experience. Also, please note, there will be no extra credit assigned for this course, nor will there be any opportunities for resubmitting an already graded assignment. Lastly, I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, as necessary. Therefore, students are advised to refer to the syllabus posted on Quercus for the most updated version.

Students with Additional Needs: The Political Science Department at the University of Toronto is committed to making educational opportunities available for all students. In order for its faculty members to adequately address the needs of students who have disabilities, it is necessary that those students approach their instructors as soon as the semester starts, preferably on the first day of class. For further information about how the University will meet your specific needs, please visit:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/accessibility-services-registration-and-documentation-requirements/>

Late Penalty: Students are strongly encouraged to submit assignment(s) on time. Any late assignment will not be accepted, with the exception of a medical emergency, where documentation is required.

Course Assignments & Student Evaluation

The composition of course grades is as follows:

Participation (15%) At the end of each class, we will finish five minutes early so you can complete a brief “ticket-out” reflection. The question will concern what we discussed in that day’s lecture. The Quercus portal will open at 12:55 pm and close at 1:00 pm, and you will have exactly five minutes to submit your response. These reflections ensure active engagement with class content and attendance is required to receive credit. Each submission is worth 1.5% of your final grade, adding up to 15% over the semester.

Quiz 1 (30%) This will be an in-class quiz administered on October 6th. The quiz is worth 30% of your final grade. You are required to answer a short prompt to be handwritten in class and submitted. You will have 45 minutes to complete the prompt. The quiz is designed to evaluate student comprehension of the readings and the ability to synthesize core details.

Quiz 2 (30%) There will be one in-class quiz administered on November 3rd. The quiz is worth 30% of your final grade. You are required to answer a short prompt to be handwritten in class and submitted. You will have 45 minutes to complete the prompt. The quiz is designed to evaluate student comprehension of the readings and the ability to synthesize core details. Students will be allotted 45 minutes to complete the quiz.

Reaction Paper (25%) This will be an in-class critical reaction paper. Students will be allotted 45 minutes to complete the critical reflection.

Please note: Attendance is mandatory.

**Grading Scale (Faculty of
Arts & Science)**

Excellent

A+: 90–100% (4.0)

A: 85–89% (4.0)

A–: 80–84% (3.7)

Good

B+: 77–79% (3.3)

B: 73–76% (3.0)

B–: 70–72% (2.7)

Adequate

C+: 67–69% (2.3)

C: 63–66% (2.0)

C–: 60–62% (1.7)

Marginal

D+: 57–59% (1.3)

D: 53–56% (1.0)

D–: 50–52% (0.7)

Inadequate

FZ: 0–49% (0.0)

TOPIC I: The Political

Course Schedule

I. Introduction

Week One – September 8

- Course introduction: syllabus, assignments, guiding questions
- What is political theory? Why study “the contemporary”?
- In-class framing discussion

II. On Politics & the Political

Week Two – September 15

- Adriana Cavarero, *Politicizing Theory* (See Quercus)
- Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (excerpts: read only sections II & III) (See Quercus)
- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Part I (pg 7-17) & “Action” (pg. 175-181) (See Quercus)

III. Gender & Sexuality Politics

Week Three – September 22

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (excerpts, Introduction pg 23-39) (See Quercus)
- Emma Goldman, *The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation* (See Quercus)
- bell hooks, *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory* (See Quercus)

Week Four – September 29

- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Feelings* (See Quercus)
- John D’Emilio, *Capitalism & Gay Identity* (See Quercus)
- Cathy J. Cohen, *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens* (See Quercus)

IV. Class & Revolutionary Politics

Week Five – October 6 (Quiz 1)

Emma Goldman, selections from *Anarchism and Other Essays*: (See Quercus)

- *Anarchism: What It Really Stands For*
- *Prisons: A Social Crime & Failure*
- *Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty*

Week Six – October 13 (Thanksgiving Monday – No Class)

Week Seven – October 20

- Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (See Quercus)
- Rosa Luxemburg, *Stagnation and Progress of Marxism* (See Quercus)
- Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (See Quercus)

Week Eight – October 27 (Reading Week – No Class)

V. Racial Politics

Week Nine – November 3 (Quiz 2)

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Homeland, Aztlán / El otro México* (See Quercus)
- Gloria Anzaldúa, *La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness* (See Quercus)
- Claire Jean Kim, *The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans* (See Quercus)

Week Ten – November 10

- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, Chapters I (See Quercus)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, Chapters II (See Quercus)
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, Chapters III (See Quercus)

Week Eleven – November 17

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Chapter 1: “On Violence” (See Quercus)
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Conclusion (Quercus)

Week Twelve – November 24 (Reaction Paper)

- Semester Review (No Readings)