PS 208: Introduction to Traditional Political Theory

Course Content:
In this course we will survey a series of concepts in political theory in order to illuminate key dimensions of social and political reality in the society in which we live. The course focuses upon five concepts that we will explore through readings, discussion, self-inquiry, experiential activities, film, media, and writing. Those five concepts are: capitalism, gender, race, punishment, and technology. By exploring these concepts in both experimental and traditional ways, we will as a group come to a new understanding of how these concepts inform our experience of contemporary society, both at an individual and societal level. We will also explore what it means to do political theory. How does one do political theory? Why are philosophical concepts necessary for the study of politics? How does one go about creating concepts? How is political theory different from other subfields in political science?

Prerequisites:
The only prerequisite for taking this course is curiosity for the subjects we will investigate, and a willingness to explore and engage with others in class. However, if you do not meet these prerequisites (i.e. you are not curious about political theory and you are not willing to engage and participate), it is advised that you not take the course.

Skills:
This quarter you will:
• Learn how to recognize theoretical debates in texts and to take a position on them.
• Learn how to write an argument.
• Learn how to link course readings with your experience of the social world.
• Learn how to engage your body and intuition in the process of thinking.
• Learn how to apply theoretical arguments to real-world problems
• Work with peers to improve writing skills and develop your writing process.

II. Course Requirements:
1) Assignment 1: 20%

2) Assignment 2: 20%
3) Assignment 3: 20%

4) Assignment 4: 20%
Detailed instructions for the written assignments will be provided.

5) Participation and Attendance: 20%
Regular class attendance and participation is worth a total of 20% of your grade. This includes submission of one discussion assignment on the readings for each week on Blackboard, unless otherwise directed. Instructions to follow.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. You are allowed 1 excused absence without penalty. Further absences will be penalized except in case of illness or emergency.

You will also be evaluated on your ability to participate in class discussions in a way that demonstrates that you have done the reading assignments and prepared adequately for class. You are expected 1) to bring the text to class with you 2) to have read the text carefully, 3) to come to class prepared to discuss aspects of the text that are unclear to you, to explore various issues in the text through discussion with classmates, and to respond to questions posed in class.

Your participation score will be based on your ability to:

- Demonstrate familiarity with assigned readings.
- Develop and express your own opinions about the texts.
- Relate the texts to other readings you have done during the course.
- Critically assess the texts and raise questions about them.
- Prepare and submit discussion assignments, when assigned.
- Participate in class activities.

The only way to receive a good participation grade is to carefully read the assigned texts and to come to class willing and ready to talk about them.

III. Class Policies
Late paper policy: Except in documented cases of serious illness or other emergency, late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day of lateness; e.g., an A- paper two days late becomes a B. However, every student will be granted one no-questions-asked 24-hour extension on a paper without penalty. To use your extension, simply write “EXTENSION” at the top of your paper and submit a hard copy AND emailed copy by the extended deadline. If you use this extension you do not need to provide an
excuse to me, and in fact should not do so. However, you are only granted one extension, except in cases of serious illness, special needs or other emergencies, so use it wisely.

**Laptop and cell phone policy:** Laptops are not to be brought to class unless you have special needs that require you to use a laptop in class or when we do special assignments in class that involve laptop usage. If you have special needs, please arrange to discuss them with me in private. Cell phones should be kept in your bag and are not to be used in class for any reason.

**Text policy:** You must use the texts from the course reader. Please do not use other editions of texts.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in an automatic zero on any given assignment. You must not, under any circumstances, copy or paraphrase direct quotes from the course materials or from any other sources without properly attributing the quotes to their sources.

**Sickness:** Due to the threat of the H1N1 flu epidemic, students are asked to PLEASE STAY HOME IF YOU THINK YOU ARE COMING DOWN WITH THE FLU or if you have any flu-like symptoms. Please email the instructor if you must miss a class for this reason. Attendance is an important part of your course requirements, but given the potential severity of the flu, it is better to err on the side of caution.

**Academic Misconduct**

The presentation of someone else's words or ideas as your own is plagiarism and is a serious offense. The University of Oregon takes a very hard line in questions of academic misconduct. It is never tolerable to present someone else’s work as your own. Sources: The failure to provide proper acknowledgment of your use of outside sources constitutes plagiarism. You must name all sources you are paraphrasing or quoting. Please consult with me if you are confused about how to make a proper citation. You can also consult Charles Lipson, *Doing Honest Work in College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic Success* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), or the Dartmouth College’s “Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgement” (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/). Both manuals offer a full explanation of what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources, including documenting sources taken from the web. **In this class we will very seldom use secondary sources. Nevertheless, if you ever consult a secondary sources you must cite to it.**

**Student Resources**

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability (physical, learning or psychological) that you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first week of the term so that we can discuss whatever accommodation(s) may be necessary. Please request that a counselor at Disability Services send a letter verifying the disability. Disability Services is located in Oregon Hall 164; email: disabsrv@uoregon.edu
**Academic Support:** The University Teaching and Learning Center provides numerous resources to help University of Oregon students succeed. Programs, workshops, courses, tutors, and mentors are among the many resources they provide to help with educational pursuits at the University of Oregon. For the services offered by the center see [http://tlc.uoregon.edu/index.html](http://tlc.uoregon.edu/index.html)

**Student Life:** If you need help and are not sure where to go, check out the Office of Student Life, located at Oregon Hall 164; email: stl@uoregon.edu. The Office of Student Life staff is available to help you find solutions and resources to most issues and concerns on a drop-in basis Monday-Friday, 8am-noon and 1pm-5pm. In emergencies after hours, contact the Department of Public Safety at (541) 346-5444 and have an on-duty staff member paged.

**University of Oregon Crisis Center:** A student-funded organization that provides students with confidential telephone crisis intervention 24/7 at (541) 346-4488.
Texts

All assigned readings are in the course reader, which is available for purchase at the Duck Store, with the exception of texts marked otherwise, which will be on Blackboard. You must purchase the course reader in order to complete the class readings. It is possible that occasionally an extra reading will be assigned, in which case I will give you instructions on how to access any additional readings.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1: Capitalism

Mon., Jan. 5: Introduction


Week 2: Class Struggle


Wed., Jan 14: In Class Activity: Documentary--Scrappers: Set in Chicago's labyrinth of alleys, SCRAPPERS is a portrait of Oscar and Otis, two metal scavengers searching for a living with brains, brawn and battered pickup trucks. The film shows how the 2008 financial collapse and crackdowns on undocumented immigrants affect these men and their families.

Assignment 1 due Thursday, Jan. 15

Week 3: From Class to Race

Mon., Jan. 19: No class, MLK Day

**Week 4: The Racial Contract**


*NOTE: THIS READING IS ON BLACKBOARD, NOT IN COURSE PACKET*


**Week 5: From Race to Gender**

**Mon. Feb. 2:** Whiteness


*NOTE: THIS READING IS ON BLACKBOARD, NOT IN COURSE PACKET*

**Wed. Feb. 4:** The concept of Gender


**Assignment 2 due Thursday, Feb. 5 by 4 pm in my mailbox**

**Week 6: Gender and Exclusion**

**Mon. Feb. 9:** Decentering Feminism


**Wed. Feb. 11:**


**Week 7: From Gender to Disciplinary Society**

**Mon. Feb. 16:** Masculinity


**Wed. Feb. 18: Discipline**  
pp. 3-31, pp. 195-228

**Week 8: Punishment**  
**Mon. Feb. 23: ** Documentary: “Broken on All Sides”  
This documentary centers around the theory put forward by many, and most recently by Michelle Alexander (who appears in the movie), that mass incarceration has become "The New Jim Crow." Much of the discrimination that was legal in the Jim Crow era is today illegal when applied to black people but perfectly legal when applied to "criminals." Through interviews with people on many sides of the criminal justice system, this documentary aims to answer questions and provoke questions on an issue walled-off from the public's scrutiny.

**Wed. Feb. 25: Michele Alexander, The New Jim Crow, Ch. 5, 178-220.**

Assignment 3 due Thursday, Feb. 26 by 4 pm in my mailbox

**Week 9: What is Technology?**  
vii-x (Preface), pp. 3-15 (Chapter 1), (Ch. 13) pp. 202-219, pp. 223-237 (Ch. 14).

**Wed. March 4:** Tom Bissell, *Extra Lives*.  
**NOTE: THIS READING IS ON BLACKBOARD, NOT IN COURSE PACKET**

**Week 10: Technology and Culture**  
**Mon. March 9**  
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”  
**NOTE: THIS READING IS ON BLACKBOARD, NOT IN COURSE PACKET**

**Wed. March 11**  
Review  
Assignment 4 due Friday, March 13