

PLSC 213: Introduction to Political Theory  
PLSC 352, Fall 2017

Instructor: Dr. Dave Ivers  
Phone: 487-2239; 487-3113  
Office: 601S Pray-Harrold

Office Hours: M-W 8-9:30, 12:30-2  
Home: 734-667-2814  
[jivers@emich.edu](mailto:jivers@emich.edu)

**Course Description:**

Political theory is a systematic critical reflection about the nature of political life. It addresses deep questions regarding the foundations of states and their normative justifications. The purpose of this course is to acquaint the students of political theory with these questions and with the various answers proposed by political theorists. It does so by observing and thinking about how various political philosophers have wrestled with these questions over the past 2500 years. Most importantly it does so by asking each student to use the framework given in the text to consider the needs of today in the terms of a US political context. We may be on the verge of a change in how we view the 'proper' governance of our country similar to the past eras of the 1828-30 period, the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and FDR's New Deal. We will also refer to and consider how such changes happen and have happened in other countries.

**Overview**

This course will provide an overview of "normative" political theory as well as set up the study of political science more generally. On most days class will be composed of equal parts lecture and discussion. Lecture will be used to give you an overview of the text or theme that we will be addressing that day. Having someone talk at you is, unsurprisingly, not a terribly successful mode of pedagogy, however. The second part of class will serve to discuss the material. Some of that will be in class, but much will be done online in discussion sessions and exercises. Both of these will be graded. We will focus on concepts and engaging in a close reading of the texts, employing a less rigid format. Some days you will be asked to reread passages of text, others you will be assigned group work, or other activities. You will, no doubt, be left with questions. This is normal. Political theory and thinking about it is new to most students. Discussions provide an opportunity to further develop the topics and arguments raised in the lectures and texts. In the discussions you will be able to delve into the material and generate your own original ideas. Political theory can give us the tools to give answers and provide reasons for the arguments we make. Politics is the domain of the collective, and political theory provides the means of offering claims and being persuasive. Whether you're in this class because you have a deep interest in the history of political thought or you need the requisite, I think this course will help you make the kind of arguments you'll need to be persuasive in life. This is a General Education course in the area of "knowledge of the disciplines (humanities)." For a full list of intended educational outcomes consult <https://www.emich.edu/gened/learningoutcomes.php>.

**Required Text:**

Spragens: Understanding Political Theory. St Martin's Press, New York.

The text has no ISBN and has been out of print for a while, but can be purchased as a Kindle download on Amazon.com for \$9.99. You do not have to buy a Kindle to read it. Download the free Kindle reader app on Amazon and use that.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend each class and arrive on time. Attendance is essential for success in this class and if you expect to earn a passing grade. Lectures will critically reinforce and supplement readings. I do not take attendance. You are adults and are expected to manage your time well. If you miss many class sessions (perhaps only 2) your semester grade is likely to suffer. Anyone who misses much more than 3 classes runs a serious danger of failing the class. If you must miss class for a justifiable reason you should notify me as soon as possible, preferably before you miss. There are some cases where a justified reason may allow for specific allowances. Do not, however, wait until near the end of the semester to plead your case. That is much too late.

**Participation:** I intend to devote a significant proportion of class time to discussing the assigned texts, and expect active participation from all students. This includes listening attentively to other students when they are speaking. I also will call on students and ask them to comment on the topic at hand. Such comments need not be 'perfect' but must show the student has considered the point of the topic and is trying to place it in the overall context of the course. Students will be allowed some time to consider their answers, but should respond as promptly as possible. I will increase semester grades up to 1/3 of a letter grade (for instance a B may become a B+) for those who respond reasonably adequately. Simply talking a lot is not enough. Succinct answers that benefit the rest of the class are great. It is much easier to produce such responses if you have carefully read the material and thought about it beforehand.

**Mid-term, Final Exams (30%, 35%):** There will be two take-home exams that will require you to write relatively short essays in response to questions.

**Online work (35%):** You will have online discussions, sometimes for the whole class and sometimes in small groups, exercises, and quizzes that will give you an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of course material and arguments.

**EMU Writing Support:** The University Writing Center (115 Halle Library) offers one-to-one writing consulting for both undergraduate and graduate students. Students can make appointments or drop in between the hours of 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Fridays. Students should bring a draft of what they're working on and their assignment. The UWC also offers small group workshops on various topics related to writing (e.g., Reading in College: Tips and Strategies; Incorporating Evidence; Revising Your Writing). Workshops are offered at various times Monday through Friday in the UWC. To register for a workshop, click the "Register" link from the UWC page at <http://www.emich.edu/english/writing-center>.

**The Academic Projects Center** (116 Halle Library) offers one-to-one consulting for students on writing, research, or technology-related issues. No appointment is required – students can just drop in. The APC is open 11-5 Monday-Thursday. Additional information about the APC can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/apc>. Students visiting the Academic Projects Center should also bring with them a draft of what they're working on and their assignment sheet. 3 The UWC also has several satellite sites across campus—in Sill Hall for COT students; in Marshall for CHHS students; in Pray-Harrold for CAS students; in Porter for CHHS and COE students; and in Owen for COB students. The locations of these sites and their hours will be posted on the UWC web site <http://www.emich.edu/english/writing-center>.

**Classroom Conduct:** Students should conduct themselves in ways that are consistent with promoting an efficient learning environment for themselves and everyone else. Students should be conscientious, helpful, properly motivated to learn, honest, and respectful of others and their opinions at all times. Such conduct is consistent with generally regarded norms of professionalism, including those found in graduate, professional degree programs. If a student “commits the offense of disorderly conduct when he/she does any act (e.g. being disobedient) in such unreasonable manners as to alarm or disturb another and to provide a breach of peace,” the professor reserves the right to deduct points for inappropriate conduct and refer the student to the University for further investigation of the matter. The professor also reserves the right to excuse the student from class for the remainder of the semester and give the student a letter grade of “F” for the course.

**University Policies: Students With Disabilities:** If you wish to be accommodated for your disability, EMU Board of Regents policy #8.3 requires that you first register with the Access Services Office (ASO) in room 203 King Hall. You may contact ASO by telephone at (734) 487-2470. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with ASO promptly as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible. Notice to all foreign students (F and J visa): To comply with all federal regulations, please contact the EMU office of International Students (OIS), 244 EMU Student Center, 734.487.3116

**Academic Honesty:** Each student in class is expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism violate the rules of the University and the ethical standards of professional public administration. Cheating and plagiarism will be punished to the full extent allowed by University rules and regulations. Plagiarism is generally defined in your student handbook as presenting as your own work that done by someone else, even if only an idea and/or not quoted directly. Cite, quote, and when in doubt, ask the instructor. Those caught cheating will be given a zero for the work in which the cheating occurred. Possible plagiarism will be dealt with on a case by case basis. In addition, you may be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Services for discipline that can result in either a suspension or permanent dismissal. The /Student Conduct Code/ contains detailed definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty, and it can be accessed online at <http://www.emich.edu/studentconduct/>

**Observance of Religious Holidays University Policy:** Eastern Michigan University recognizes the rights of students to observe religious holidays without penalty to the student. University Practice: Students will provide advance notice to their instructors in order to make up work,

including examinations that they miss as a result of their absence from class due to observance of religious holidays. If satisfactory arrangements cannot be made with the appropriate instructor(s), students may appeal to the head(s) of the department(s) in which the course(s) is/are offered. There are many resources on line regarding the observance of religious holidays; here is one site with an extensive listing of holiday dates:

<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/2013.htm>

**Students with Disabilities:** If you wish to be accommodated for your disability EMU Board of Regents policy #8.3 requires that you first register with the Access Services Office (ASO) in room 203 King Hall. You may contact ASO by telephone at (734) 487-2470. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with ASO promptly as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible.

In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectation, students are responsible for understanding all applicable university guidelines, policies, and procedures. The EMU Student Handbook is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or the date specified in the amendment. Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resource, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, [734.487.0074](tel:734.487.0074), [emu\\_ombuds@emich.edu](mailto:emu_ombuds@emich.edu), or visit the website at [www.emich.edu/ombuds](http://www.emich.edu/ombuds).

[CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies](#)

The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus as necessary.

### **Class Schedule:**

Day one: Syllabus, discussion of the rules for the class, intro to thinking about political theory

Week 1: Read chapter 1 in Spragens before the first class. What is political theory? Why should we care? Can everyone 'do' political theory? What is the difference between political and political ideology? Why does that difference matter?  
first online discussion.

Week 2: Continuing Spragens. How do we use political theory? How do we understand political theory?

Reading online for small group discussion.

Weeks 3-4 Spragens chapter 2. What is going wrong? The use of diagnosis and the perception of disorder. How and why is political theory developed? What is the point? How many people need to be unhappy before a change is in order? What disorder do you see in current US society,

culture, and government. What is to be done? There will be online readings.  
There will be a online readings and a weekly discussion of this topic.

Weeks 5-7: Diagnosis. Spragens Chapter 3. Assuming we know what is wrong, what should we try to do? What are the trade-offs? Who will be helped and who will not? Why?  
There will be a online readings and a weekly discussion of this topic.

### ***Midterm***

Week 8-9 Order and Imagination. Spragens Chapter 4. Norms and breakdowns. Reconstruction. What are norms, and where do they come from? What need do they serve. What is the difference between norms and laws? Do we need laws? Why? The case of the “Plain People”. To what end are we aiming? What may prevent us from reaching our desired end?  
There will be a online readings and a weekly discussion of this topic.

Week 10-11 Prescription. Spragens Chapter 5. The linkage of is to ought. Facts and complexity. Potentiality, limits and constraints. Reality vs Illusion.  
There will be a online readings and a weekly discussion of this topic.

Week 12 Conclusion. Spragens Chapter 6. Vision, therapy, and the master science.  
There will be a online readings and a weekly discussion of this topic.

Week 13-14 Discuss everything we’ve covered.

### ***Final***

The exact due dates for online work will be found on Canvas.