

POLI 368R **PROBLEMS IN POLITICAL OBLIGATION**
 Fall, 2021

Brigham Young University
 Department of Political Science
 POLI 368R--001
 MWF 2:00-2:50
 227 RB

Instructor: Ryan Davis

rwDavis@byu.edu

ryanw1785@gmail.com

Office Hours: MW 3:00-4:30pm, and open door policy

Description

Why do people disagree so much about politics? Is there something special – or especially difficult – about our political beliefs? How much should we worry that our beliefs are the product of biases?

The aim of this class is to think about our obligations relating to our political beliefs. Can we wrong people by holding bad beliefs? If so, what kinds of beliefs are wrong? How can we protect ourselves from making these mistakes?

The project of this class is to encounter other people's beliefs about politics – first hand. We will (probably?) four visitors over the course of the semester. All of them have thought about – and written academic papers on – the topic of beliefs and rationality. They are interested in questions of bias in belief in politics and religion, and also in the ethics of joint deliberation with others. Before each visitor comes to class, we will read their work and talk about and think about how best to ask them questions. There will also be a couple of (optional) supplementary events, including a panel about how to think about our own political participation.

Philosophy affects us only insofar as we work at it. With that in mind, this class will be a kind of invitation to work on reflecting on our own political beliefs. We will do this by practicing reading and writing, and also through a few other participation activities outside of class. Hopefully, by the end we will think about our political beliefs and how they affect us and those around us in a more self-conscious and considered way. Is that too much to hope for?

Course Objectives

This course will be run as a seminar, which aspires to be as much like a reading group as possible. Seminars provide a discussion setting: students are encouraged to speak directly to other students as well as to the instructor. The purpose of this course is to provide students with an opportunity to

develop skills and work that anticipates graduate study in political philosophy or cognate fields. In particular, students will:

1. Produce a seven to ten page paper written in a professional philosophical style. The idea is for this piece of writing that could have a future life—for instance, in graduate applications.
2. Advance in understanding of philosophical methodology. Attention will be given to articulating premises clearly and to understanding inferential validity. Argumentative tools such as deduction, abduction, induction, and reflective equilibrium will be considered.
3. Gain knowledge of a contemporary literature in moral and political philosophy.

Learning Outcomes

Be spiritually strengthened

Be able to articulate principles of faith in political analysis

Effective and Professional Writing

Write professional grade research papers on political science questions.

Political Process, Theory, and Thought

Study a specialized topic in political science together with your classmates, under the guidance of the professor.

Effective Oral Communication

Communicate effectively by presenting ideas in a high quality oral presentation.

Politics, International Relations, and Political Philosophy

Deepen familiarity with the subfield of political philosophy and of political science more broadly.

Critical Thinking and Analysis

Think critically, analytically, and synthetically.

Effective Oral Communication

Develop effective communicative skills with respect to an abstract subject matter.

Faith and Political Analysis

Be able to articulate principles of faith in political analysis.

Politics, International Relations, and Political Philosophy

Demonstrate a familiarity with each of the four major subfields of political science: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, and political philosophy.

Political Process, Theory, and Thought

Possess a factual and theoretical knowledge of countries, political processes, political theories, and political thought.

Effective Research and Analysis

Use appropriate methods of analysis and research, including qualitative and quantitative methods, historical comparison, and textual interpretation to answer political questions.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. Everyone has one free absence. After that, absences can count against your grade.

Schedule (proposed)

1. Aug. 30 Introduction: How much is what we believe a matter of identity?
2. Sep. 1 Thi Nguyen, "[Polarization or Propaganda?](#)"

3. Sep. 3 Thi Nguyen, "Escape the Echo Chamber"
"Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"
4. Sep. 8 Thi Nguyen, "Games and the Art of Agency"
5. Sep. 10 Exploitation and History: The case of historical board games
6. Sep. 13 Review: Question prep
7. Sep. 15 **Thi Nguyen visits class**
8. Sep. 17 Regina Rini, "Abortion, Ultrasound, and Moral Persuasion"
Rachel Finlayson visits class
9. Sep. 20 Kathryn Lofton, "Understanding is Dangerous"
10. Sep. 22 Amia Sreenivasan, "The Aptness of Anger"
11. Sep. 24 Case Study: Darryl Davis
Malcom X
12. Sep. 27 McCaulley, Reading While Black, chs. 6-7
13. Sep. 29 McCaulley, Reading While Black, ch. 4
14. Oct. 1 McCaulley, Reading While Black, ch. 5
15. Oct. 4 Nagel, "The Absurd"
16. Oct. 6 Agnes Callard, "Why Philosophers Shouldn't Sign Petitions"
17. Oct. 8 Emily Brady, "Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature"
18. Oct. 11 The case of the Sage Grouse
19. Oct. 13 Review: Catch up
20. Oct. 15 **Midterm**
21. Oct. 18 **Midterm**
22. Oct. 20 Schoenfield, "Why Do you Believe What You Do?"
23. Oct. 22 Schoenfield, "Meditations on Beliefs Formed Arbitrarily"
24. Oct. 25 Schoenfield, "Meditations on Beliefs Formed Arbitrarily"
25. Oct. 27 Activity: Thinking about beliefs formed arbitrarily
26. Oct. 29 Schoenfield, "Deferring to Doubt"
27. Nov. 1 Schoenfield, "Deferring to Doubt"
28. Nov. 3 Review and Question Prep
29. Nov. 5 **Miriam Schoenfield visits class**
30. Nov. 8 Givens, manuscript
31. Nov. 10 Givens, manuscript
32. Nov. 12 Givens, Crucible of Doubt, selection
33. Nov. 15 Review and Question Prep
34. Nov. 17 **Terryl Givens visits class**
35. Nov. 19 Scheffler, "Relationships and Responsibilities"
36. Nov. 22 Scheffler, "Relationships and Responsibilities"
37. Nov. 23 Blackburn, "Religion and Respect"
38. Nov. 24 THANKSGIVING
39. Nov. 26 THANKSGIVING
40. Nov. 29 Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion"
41. Dec. 1 Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion"
42. Dec. 3 Setiya, "Love and the Value of a Life"

- 43. Dec. 6 Setiya, "Love and the Value of a Life"
- 44. Dec. 8 Review and Conclude

Grading:

(1) Mid Term Exam (15%)

This exam will occur cover the first half of the course, and will include a short answer section and an essay section. It will be in the Testing Center.

(2) Final Exam (30%)

This exam will be comprehensive, but will focus on the second half of the course. It will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay sections. The final exam will **16 December 2019, 7:00am-10:00am, 121 MARB.**

(3) Short Writing (20%)

There will be one practice short writing, and then six short writing assignments. They will be short (200-500 words). If a student gets a 90% on five of the six short writings, they will get a full A on this part of the class. From there:

90% on four of six: A-

90% on three of six: B+

90% on two of six: B

90% on one of six: B-

No assignments at 90%, but at least four completed: C+

No assignments at 90%, but at least three completed: C

No assignments at 90%, but at least two completed: C-

No assignments at 90%, but at least one completed: D+

"Completion" requires something like a sincere effort at the assignment.

Students may revise up to two of the short writings after getting an initial score. I will not provide detailed feedback, but will be available to discuss the assignments in person or by zoom. (This way I am expending time that won't get a return on the investment.) For each Revise and Resubmit not used by a student, the student will receive an additional extra credit point on the final exam.

(4) Final Paper (15%)

This paper will defend a thesis that is related to the themes of course, and will be around seven to ten pages. The paper should include a detailed engagement with at least one of the readings from class. It should also include at least three outside sources from academic philosophical books or journals. The essay should present a novel, valid argument for its thesis in which each premise is clearly delineated. The paper should also use the philosophical tools developed during the semester, including close reading, argument reconstruction, and case analysis.

(5) Participation (10%)

There will be **three** components to the participation score. The **first** is in class discussion. Part of the work of this course is to carefully do the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. If philosophical reading were described in one word, it would be: slow. Read slowly. We will be interested not in the general sense given by the argument, but in the details of the argument. Is the argument valid? Is it sound? (Note: these are logical technical terms, and their meanings may not correspond exactly to how these words are used in conversational English.) Participation should be *informed* and *respectful*. If a comment is informed by the reading and respectful of others, it can appropriately express any opinion. If a student – for any reason – does not feel comfortable participating in class, please talk to me in person about arranging another way to receive the participation credit for this class.

The **second** part of the participation score is in completing two philosophical activities. These will be outside activities involving applications from one of the readings.

The **third** part of the participation score will be preparing question for each of the class guests.

(6) Attendance (10%)

Coming to class is part of the work of this course. Because the class only meets twice a week, each class period is a relatively significant component of the course. One class may be missed for any reason without a reduction in the attendance grade. For each subsequent class period missed, the attendance grade will be lowered .5%. So for example, if a student misses three class periods, they will receive 90% (A-) as the attendance grade. If a class is missed for a relevantly justified reason (illness, important family issue, etc.), it can be made up by submitting a 500 word précis of that day's reading within one week of the absence. It is the student's job to send me the document within the week. University excused absences are excused, but please do let me know about these cases.

(7) Extra Credit

There may be opportunities for extra credit, which will be described in more detail as they arise.

Assignment Schedule:

Seeing learning suite for the updated assignment schedule.

Final Grades:

I reserve the right to improve, although not to reduce, a student's final grade. Such changes will not be made in response to requests.

Office Hours:

If you are having trouble in any way that relates to your participation as a student in this class, please come see me. If you come see me early in the semester, I can help you develop a plan to work on your grade. If you wait until late in the semester, options will be more limited. Do not hesitate to visit my office if you have concerns, or are having difficulties in the class. If you are not available to meet during scheduled office hours, I am very often in my office at many other times during the week. I have an open door policy, which is: It is ok to stop by my office anytime. I may sometimes be busy, in which case I ask that we set up a separate appointment.

Email:

Please allow for 24 hours before expecting a response to an email. If you have emailed me and have not received any reply, please do send a reminder. I sometimes will lose email and am not offended by having this called to my attention. Please send all electronic communication to my actual email address. I **will not respond** to communications sent to me through the Learning Suite website.

Exceptional Circumstances:

Sometimes things happen that are beyond our control. Any syllabus is designed to make expectations clear, and so documents like this one have a tendency to sound harsh. If you have a serious life event of some kind, or if you are afraid that you are falling behind in class, please contact me earlier in the semester rather than later. The earlier I become aware of your particular circumstances, the more we can do to work out a plan together to get back on track in a way that is compatible with fairness to other students. If you do not see me till late in the semester, there may be little that can be done to affect a poor grade.

University Policies:

Plagiarism

While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. General information about the honor code can be found at honorcode.byu.edu. Details about Academic Honesty are found at <http://saas.byu.edu/catalog/2010-2011ucat/GeneralInfo/HonorCode.php>.

Writing submitted for credit at BYU must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing.

The substitution of another person's work for the student's own or the inclusion of another person's work without adequate acknowledgment (whether done intentionally or not) is known as plagiarism. It is a violation of academic, ethical, and legal standards and can result in a failing grade not only for the paper but also for the course in which the paper is written. In extreme cases, it can justify expulsion from

the University. Because of the seriousness of the possible consequences, students who wonder if their papers are within these guidelines should visit the Writing Lab or consult a faculty member who specializes in the teaching of writing or who specializes in the subject discussed in the paper. Useful books to consult on the topic include the current Harbrace College Handbook, the MLA Handbook, and James D. Lester's Writing Research Papers.

Preventing Sexual Misconduct

As required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the university prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in its education programs or activities. Title IX also prohibits sexual harassment—including sexual violence—committed by or against students, university employees, and visitors to campus. As outlined in university policy, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are considered forms of “Sexual Misconduct” prohibited by the university.

University policy requires any university employee in a teaching, managerial, or supervisory role to report incidents of Sexual Misconduct that come to their attention through various forms including face-to-face conversation, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. If you encounter Sexual Misconduct, please contact the Title IX Coordinator at t9coordinator@byu.edu or 801-422-2130 or Ethics Point at <https://titleix.byu.edu/report-concern> or 1-888-238-1062 (24-hours). Additional information about Title IX and resources available to you can be found at titleix.byu.edu.

In addition, individuals may submit reports, including anonymous reports, through EthicsPoint, the university's 24-hour hotline provider, by telephone at 888-238-1062, or by submitting information online at https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/en/default_reporter.asp. A report of Sexual Misconduct (“Report”) can be made verbally or in writing.

Learning Atmosphere

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the UAC office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Office at 422-5895, D-282 ASB.

Mental Health

Mental health concerns and stressful life events can affect students' academic performance and quality of life. BYU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS, 1500 WSC, 801-422-3035, caps.byu.edu) provides individual, couples, and group counseling, as well as stress management services. These services are confidential and are provided by the university at no cost for full-time students. For general information please visit <https://caps.byu.edu>; for more immediate concerns please visit <http://help.byu.edu>.

