

ISS 2440: Introduction to Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Spring 2026
- 100% In-Person, no GTAs, 35 residential students
- T Period 4 (10:40–11:30 AM) & R Period 4–5 (10:40–12:35 PM)
- CSE 0487
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Gianna Englert
- CSE E546
- Tel: 352-294-0087
- genglert@ufl.edu
- Office hours: Tuesdays, 1–3 PM & by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to core debates, concepts, and tools that will help them understand the complex interplay of philosophy, politics, economics, and law in the modern world. By reading and discussing a wide range of historical and contemporary texts, students will learn how philosophical, political, economic, and legal analyses can complement (and challenge) each other. The aim is for students to develop a multidisciplinary point of view that will allow them to analyze and address contemporary problems in a fuller way than any one disciplinary lens permits. This course provides a foundation for more advanced work in the PPEL major and minor.

Required Readings and Works

1. Required readings will be posted as PDFs to Canvas as noted on the schedule below. See the “Modules” page of Canvas for PDFs of the readings for any given week.

2. Materials and Supplies Fees: N/A.

Course Objectives

1. Identify core issues and debates at the intersection of politics, philosophy, economics, and law
2. Utilize key approaches and methods from across all four disciplines to analyze normative and ethical questions
3. Use the tools from PPEL to evaluate contemporary issues of economic and public policy and the proposed solutions to them

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Attendance: 20% total

a. Participation: 15%

- i. An exemplary participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class; consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion; and listens considerately to other students. See the participation rubric below. (R)

b. Class Attendance: 5%

- i. On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. You may have three unexcused absences without any penalty. But starting with the fourth class missed, your grade will be affected. Any unexcused absence beyond the third reduces your attendance grade by 3 points: a 90 becomes an 87 and so on.
- ii. Except for absence because of religious holiday observance, documentation is required for excused absences, per [university policy](#). Excessive unexcused absences (10 or more) will result in failure of the course. If you miss 10 or more classes (excused or not), you will miss material essential for successful completion of the course.

2. Exam #1, Tuesday, March 10: 25%

- a. Students will take an in-class, written exam during Week 9. It will consist of essay, short answer, and multiple choice questions.

3. Reading Quizzes: 15%

- a. During 5 class days of the term, students will take an in-class quiz about the assigned reading for that particular day. The quizzes will be given at the start of class on the Tuesdays designated below. They are closed note and closed book, and will include some combination of multiple choice and short answer questions designed to test your understanding of the readings.
- b. **Quiz Dates: Tuesday, 1/27; Tuesday, 2/10; Tuesday, 3/3; Tuesday, 3/31; Tuesday, 4/7**
- c. Please see me well ahead of time if you have an excused absence on a scheduled quiz day.

4. **Brief Reading Response, due Friday, March 27th at 11:59 PM: 15%**
 - a. On Friday, March 27th, students will submit an approximately 600–900 word response to a problem raised in the readings for that week. I will provide instructions for this brief response paper at least two weeks before the due date.
 - b. The professor will evaluate and provide written feedback on all written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
 - c. Students may want to access the university's [Writing Studio](#).
 - d. An additional writing guide website can be found at [Purdue OWL](#).
 - e. See the Writing Assessment Rubric below.

5. **Exam #2, Tuesday, April 21st: 25%**
 - a. The final exam will take the same format as the midterm. It will consist of essay, short answer, and multiple choice questions.

III. Weekly Schedule

PART I: THE FOUNDATIONS OF PPEL

WEEK 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION: THINKING LIKE A POLITICAL ECONOMIST

What does it mean to think like a political economist? How can we judge the economic consequences of an action? This week, we will introduce the themes and questions that will motivate this course. We will also read a selection from Bastiat's essay "What is Seen and What is Unseen," on the immediate and visible versus long-term and "unseen" consequences of an action.

Note: All readings for this course are available on the Modules page of Canvas. You should arrive to class having already done the reading listed for that particular day.

Readings (12 pages):

Tuesday, January 13th:

Course & syllabus introduction

Thursday, January 15th:

- I. Frédéric Bastiat, "What is Seen and What is Unseen, or Political Economy in One Lesson" (1850), selections, 12 pages

WEEK 2: MARKETS & THE DIVISION OF LABOR

This week, students will read and discuss Adam Smith's arguments about the advantages and disadvantages of the division of labor, as well as Smith's explanation of the "invisible hand" of the market.

Readings (22 pages):

Tuesday, January 20th:

- I. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776), selections, 12 pages

Thursday, January 22nd:

- I. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, selections, 10 pages

WEEK 3: THE PRICE SYSTEM

This week, we will read two perspectives on the price system: F.A. Hayek's essay on prices as a coordinating signal and John Locke's claims about "just" versus "unjust" price.

Readings (22 pages):

Tuesday, January 27th:

- I. F.A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (1945), 12 pages

Assignment: Reading Quiz #1

Thursday, January 29th:

- I. Locke, "Venditio" (1695), 10 pages

WEEK 4: PRIVATE PROPERTY I

The concepts of private ownership and private property raise a series of interrelated ethical, political, economic, and legal questions. This week, students will read two classic justifications for property rights in the writings of John Locke and David Hume.

Readings (32 pages):

Tuesday, February 3rd:

- I. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) Chapter II: Of the State of Nature and Chapter V: Of Property, 20 pages.

Thursday, February 5th:

- I. David Hume, "Of the origin of justice and property" (1739) from *A Treatise of Humane Nature*, 12 pages.

WEEK 5: PRIVATE PROPERTY II: CRITICS

This week, students will read commentaries on the injustice and illegitimacy of private property, from Thomas Paine's proposal for agrarian justice to Karl Marx's claims about capitalist alienation.

Readings (30 pages):

Tuesday, February 10th:

1. Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice" (1797), selections, 12 pages
2. Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867), selections, 10 pages total

Assignment: Reading Quiz #2

Thursday, February 12th:

1. Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, selections, 8 pages

PART II: 'THE ECONOMIC WAY OF THINKING'

WEEK 6: RATIONAL CHOICE

What does it mean to make a "rational" choice? How do our models of rational decision-making shape our understanding of human behavior in the political, economic, and social arenas? Students will encounter these questions in an essay by Nobel prize-winning economist Gary Becker. They will also read a critique of the rational choice perspective from the field of behavioral economics.

Readings (45 pages):

Tuesday, February 17th:

1. Gary Becker, "The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior" (1993) in *PPE: Anthology*, pp. 35-44.
2. Sendhil Mullainathan and Richard Thaler, "How Behavioral Economics Differs from Traditional Economics," EconLib.

<https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/BehavioralEconomics.html>

Thursday, February 19th: NO CLASS, Professor is on research travel

WEEK 7: GAME THEORY

Students will continue their study of rational choice theory this week by learning to use game theory to model strategic decision-making. Our guest lecturer for this week is **Professor Mitch Harvey**, who earned his PhD in Economics from Stanford University & now teaches PPEL at UF.

Readings (13 pages):

Tuesday, February 24th & Thursday, February 26th:

1. Osborne, *An Introduction to Game Theory* (2000), pp. 1-7, 9-15

WEEK 8: COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS

How can human beings coordinate their actions to achieve better outcomes than they would by acting individually? This week's readings by Mancur Olson and Elinor Ostrom discuss collective action in relation to public goods and common pool resources.

Readings (37 pages):

Tuesday, March 3rd:

1. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), selections, 10 pages

Assignment: Reading Quiz #3

Thursday, March 5th:

2. Elinor Ostrom, "Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms" (2000), selections, 12 pages
3. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (1990), Chapter 1: Reflections on the Commons, selections, pp. 1-15

WEEK 9: EXAM #1 & PUBLIC CHOICE ECONOMICS

How can analytic tools from economics be applied to political action, and in what ways is the political arena both like and unlike a market? Public Choice analysis, which originated in the work of Nobel economist James Buchanan in the mid-20th century, addresses these questions.

Readings (6 pages):

Tuesday, March 10th: **Exam #1**

Thursday, March 12th:

1. James Buchanan, "Politics Without Romance," (1984), 6 pages

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASSES

PART III: APPLICATIONS OF PPEL

Over the next four weeks, students will apply the concepts and tools that they have learned thus far to analyze specific problems and policy issues.

WEEK 11: VOTING

Voting is often understood as a fundamental act of citizenship in a liberal democracy. But while citizens have the right to vote, do they a moral duty to do so? Students will consider a number of philosophical analyses of voting and its purpose.

Note: your assignment is due on **Friday** evening of this week!

Readings (33 pages + 8 min 28 second video):

Tuesday, March 24th:

1. John Stuart Mill, "On Plural Voting" from *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform* (1859), ~10 pages

Thursday, March 26th:

1. Jason Brennan, "Introduction" to *Against Democracy* (2015), pp. 1-23
2. Geoffrey Brennan, "Expressive Voting" YouTube video, 8 min 28 seconds
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qp7C2WQQMk>

Assignment: Reading Response Due by 11:59 PM on Friday, March 27th.

WEEK 12: PATERNALISM & "NUDGING"

Readings (27 pages + a brief YouTube video):

Tuesday, March 31:

1. Sarah Conly, "Introduction" to *Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism* (2013), pp. 1-10

Assignment: Reading Quiz #4

Thursday, April 2nd:

1. Cass Sunstein, "Nudging: A Very Short Guide" (2014), 7 pages
2. Jeremy Waldron, "It's All For Your Own Good (2014), *New York Review of Books*, 10 pages
3. "The Piano Stair Nudge," YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lXh2noaPyw>

WEEK 13: MARKETS & MORALITY I: SEX & SURROGACY

Readings (44 pages):

Tuesday, April 7th:

1. Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be For Sale* (2010), Chapter 4: “Noxious Markets,” pp. 91–115

Assignment: Reading Quiz #5

Thursday, April 9th:

1. Martha Nussbaum, “Whether from Reason or Prejudice: Taking Money for Bodily Services” in *PPE: Anthology*, pp. 551–571

WEEK 14: MARKETS & MORALITY II: DATING & MARRIAGE

Readings (30 pages):

Tuesday, April 14th:

1. Bradford Tuckfield, “Attraction Inequality and the Dating Economy” (2019), <https://quillette.com/2019/03/12/attraction-inequality-and-the-dating-economy/>

Thursday, April 16th:

1. Aja Gabel, “The Marriage Crisis” (2012) <https://uvamagazine.org/articles/the-marriage-crisis>
2. David Friedman, “Marriage, Sex, and Babies (2019) http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Laws_Order_draft/laws_order_ch_13.htm

WEEK 15: EXAM #2

Tuesday, April 21st: **Exam #2**

IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

A (90–100%)	Typically comes to class with pre-prepared questions about the readings. Engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others and consistently elevates the level of discussion.
B (80–89%)	Does not always come to class with pre-prepared questions about the reading. Waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.
C (70–79%)	Attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. Is only adequately prepared for discussion.
D (60–69%)	Fails to attend class regularly and is inadequately prepared for discussion. Is an unwilling participant in discussion.
E (<60%)	Attends class infrequently and is wholly unprepared for discussion. Refuses to participate in discussion.

Examination Rubric: Essays and Short Answers

	Completeness	Analysis	Evidence	Writing
A (90–100%)	Shows a thorough understanding of the question. Addresses all aspects of the question completely.	Analyses, evaluates, compares and/or contrasts issues and events with depth.	Incorporates pertinent and detailed information from both class discussions and assigned readings.	Presents all information clearly and concisely, in an organized manner.
B (80–89%)	Presents a general understanding of the question. Completely addresses most aspects of the question or address all aspects incompletely.	Analyses or evaluates issues and events, but not in any depth.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details but does not support all aspects of the task evenly.	Presents information fairly and evenly and may have minor organization problems.
C (70–79%)	Shows a limited understanding of the question. Does not address most aspects of the question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating accurate, relevant facts.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details, but omits concrete examples, includes inaccurate information and/or does not support all aspects of the task.	Lacks focus, somewhat interfering with comprehension.
D (60–69%)	Fails fully to answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating vague, irrelevant, and/or inaccurate facts.	Does not incorporate information from pertinent class discussion and/or assigned readings.	Organizational problems prevent comprehension.
E (<60%)	Does not answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events.	Does not adduce any evidence.	Incomprehensible organization and prose.

Writing Rubric

	Thesis and Argumentation	Use of Sources	Organization	Grammar, mechanics and style
A (90–100%)	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the paper.	No errors.
B (80–89%)	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the text under consideration. May have gaps in argument’s logic.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are incorporated but not contextualized significantly.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	A few errors.
C (70–79%)	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the text. Argument is weak, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are mostly incorporated but are not properly contextualized.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable but does not tie up all loose ends.	Some errors.
D (60–69%)	Thesis is vague and/or confused. Demonstrates a failure to understand the text. Argument lacks any logical flow and does not	Primary and/or secondary texts are almost wholly absent.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear conclusion, and the paper	Many errors.

	utilize any source material.		just ends. Little or no employment of logical body paragraphs.	
E ($<60\%$)	There is neither a thesis nor any argument.	Primary and/or secondary texts are wholly absent.	The paper is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.	Scores of errors.

V. Required Policies

Academic Policy

All academic policies in this course are consistent with university policies, which can be found here: <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>