

Introduction to Political Thinking
POLSC-AD 130
NYUAD
SUMMER 2016

Instructor: Mario L. Chacón
Office: 155 A5
E-mail: mario.chacon@nyu.edu
Tel: +971 26284450

Academic Fellow: TBD

Course description: This course introduces students to the main concepts, tools, and debates of political science. It focuses on individual decision makers in the world of politics (e.g., citizens, voters, legislators) and explores how they are linked together and how their decisions shape political outcomes. Students will be introduced to many of the primary theories, models, and concepts that political scientists use to understand political and social life. For instance, theories of social choice (how groups of rational individuals make decisions) and collective action (how groups of individuals take action collectively) will be explored. The course will also examine how political institutions, such as political regimes, electoral rules, or forms of government, can structure the interactions of these actors and affect outcomes. The course relies on cases and examples, and incorporates readings from contemporary sources to illustrate how these theories of political behavior and institutions can shed light on current political events.

Prerequisites: None

Learning Outcomes: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Explain the central concepts and debates in modern political science.
- Learn how political scientists look at the world and approach problems.
- Learn and understand the political development of a particular country or region.
- Explain the role of economic factors in the policy making process
- Distinguish between different political regimes and institutions
- Learn about the normative debates in the discipline.

Teaching and Learning Methodologies: The course is taught through lectures, discussions, written and oral assignments, and presentations by students. Each day will contain a presentation of stylized facts, the main theoretical concepts followed by a student-lead presentation and discussion. Students should always be prepared to answer questions and explain the concepts of the assigned readings. Class sessions are accompanied by visual aids (e.g., maps, scatterplots, and graphs) and slides.

Time and location: MoTuWeSu 9:00AM - 12:00PM. Comp Research (A2-002).

Office hours: Wednesday 3-5pm or by appointment.

Participation and attendance policies: Attendance is mandatory and class participation is a crucial component of the class. Hence, attendance and participation will have a big weight in the final grade (see below the distribution of points). Students are expected to have completed all the required readings for each day **before** the class meeting. In addition, each student will have a daily assignment based on the readings to be presented during class.

Components of the final grade: the final grade is based on the following components:

- Four weekend assignments 30% (7.5% each)
These will be distributed every Wednesday and are due on Sunday at the beginning of class in hardcopy. Late assignment will not be accepted.

- Final paper 30%

This is a case study based on a single reading/theory and about one particular country. This should be an independent project each student should develop in consultation with the instructor. Students are free to choose the research design, the data, and the scope of the case. Papers are due the day of the final exam and should not be longer than 12 (single-spaced) pages.

- Class participation 40%

Class participation will be guided by a daily assignment. We will have two types of assignment: i) a “case based” assignment in which each student will apply the concepts/theories of class to an specific case (chosen by the student), and ii) a “paper based” assignment which will be based on a single reading and on a very specific set of questions distributed in advance. The participation component also includes a 5 minutes news briefing each student will make every Sunday about the main political events occurring in their home country that corresponding week.

Class Policies:

- Weekend homeworks must be handed in hard copy at the beginning of class on the date which they are due (please do not send these by e-mail).
- Laptops and cell phones are not allowed during class.
- Students absent due to an illness or a family emergency should be provide proof of such situation (e.g., medical note).
- Final papers are due on the final day of the final exams (Sat June 18).

Class outline and deadlines

Class 1 (Sun May 22). Introduction and class overview

*** May 23 (Monday) No classes: Commencement ***

Class 2 (Tue May 24). Basic Tools of Positive Political Science

- Class participation: paper based assignment.

Class 3 (Wed May 25). Power

- Class participation: case study based assignment.

*** May 26 (Thursday) Drop deadline ***

Class 4 (Sun May 29). States

- Class participation: case study based assignment
- First weekend homework due.

Class 5 (Mon May 30). The Logic of Collective Action

- Class participation: paper based assignment.

Class 6 (Tue May 31). Institutions

- Class participation: case study based assignment.

Class 7 (Wed June 1). The International System

- Class participation: paper based assignment.

Class 8 (Sun June 5). Political Regimes

- Class participation: case study based assignment.

Class 9 (Mon June 6). Political Economics and Special Interests

- Class participation: case study based assignment

Class 10 (Tue June 7). Identity Politics I

- Class participation: case study based assignment

Class 11 (Wed June 8). Identity Politics II

- Class participation: paper based assignment.

*** June 9 (Thursday) Withdrawal and change of grading basis deadline ***

Class 12 (Sun June 12). Political Competition in Consolidated Democracies

- Class participation: paper based assignment/case study based assignment

Class 13 (Mon June 13). Political Competition in Non-Democracies

- Class participation: paper based assignment/case study based assignment

Class 14 (Tue June 14). War

- Class participation: case study based assignment

Class 15 (Wed June 15). Normative Problems

- Class participation: case study based assignment

*** June 16 (Thursday) Last day of classes ***

*** June 18 (Saturday) Final Papers Due ***