University of Central Florida

POT 4066 Contemporary Political Theory

Summer D 2015

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Marien

Teaching Assistant: Marcos Degaut Pontes

Course Information

Office Hours:	Online consultation nearly 24/7 at: Daniel.Marien@ucf.edu or via course email.
Alternative Email Address:	danielmarien@yahoo.com

Basic Expectations

Students are expected to: (1) always have a working connection to the internet; (2) to promptly procure the textbook; (3) to regularly log-on to the course's website in Webcourses; (4) to take quizzes and submit postings in due time; (5) to regularly consult the Announcements function in Webcourses (for general updates on course progress); and (6) to regularly consult their Knights email (for personal messages).

Course Contents

This course in political philosophy focuses on the concept of social justice. We explore three broad approaches to answering this central question in politics: "What is fair?"

One approach is based on the promotion of individual freedom. Another focuses on the maximization of pleasure or utility. A third is shaped by the pursuit of virtue, i.e. notions of the good life. Each broad approach can spawn multiple versions. We use an engaging book by Harvard University Professor Michael Sandel to guide us in this exploration in the first half of the semester.

In the second half of the semester, these three approaches are applied to four different concrete issues: (1) should prostitution be legalized? (2) are immigration restrictions morally legitimate? (3) are deepening economic inequalities morally neutral and acceptable? (4) should access to higher education be provided for free by the community to all academically qualified persons?

Students will select one such question and write two brief essays on it.

Overall, this course provides an exciting opportunity to enlarge and enrich how we make judgments about the central questions of what is just and unjust, fair and unfair in policy, society, and economy. You may look at it as education for better citizenship.

Course Goals and Objectives

- ### Course Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. To explain and describe the themes, assumptions, ideas, and practical conclusions of three broad approaches to the concept of justice: utility, liberty and virtue.
2. To apply the three foregoing approaches to specific, concrete and controversial issues.
3. To demonstrate abilities in critical thinking, effective communication and writing, and attentive reading

Course Materials

You will need to have access to the following:

A/ Textbook

Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009, ISBN: 978-0-374-5350-5.

B/ Essay Related Materials

Other required materials will be made available in electronic form in Webcourses under Files in due time.

Assessment Description

Weekly Quizzes on Sandel's Book: 25 points

Each quiz will count from 10 to 20 multiple choice questions. Time will be limited. You have access to the book. The quiz opens on Mondays at 9:00 A.M. and closes that Monday evening at 11:59 P.M. (for May 25th; June 1st; June 8th; 15th).

Answers to Discussion Questions: 20 points

Each week every student must post their answers to discussion questions in the general Weekly Discussion Board in Webcourses. The general Weekly Board closes on Monday evenings at 11:59 A.M. (for May 25th; June 1st; June 8th; 15th).

Discussion questions are communicated in the weekly module, available in Webcourses under Modules, one week ahead of the submission deadline. For example, questions with a submission deadline of May 25 are circulated in the WEEK 1 Module available under Files starting May 18. The readings assignments in the various Modules are also stated in the Course Outline below (see Course Schedule)

Discussion questions will be of three kinds: reading comprehension; application, evaluation. **Reading comprehension questions** test your understanding of the assigned readings. **Application questions** challenge you to apply a concept defined in the readings in a different context or to a different example than the one referred to in the readings. This is also a way of verifying that you understand the reading. **Evaluation questions** solicit your considerate judgment on an issue, idea or concept. Develop an argument grounded in reasons and data. Avoid making unsupported assertions.

Each weekly posting by an individual student must be written in good academic English (avoid imprecise or familiar language) and add up to a minimum of 600 original words (all answers taken together).

Engaging Class Participants on Sandel: 5 points + Extra Credit Opportunity

You are expected to engage classmates on their answers to evaluation questions related to Sandel's discussion at least twice during the first five weeks of the semester.

Each thoughtful post of 250 words or more earns 2.5 points for a total of 5 points. Additional postings can earn you up to extra-credit 5 points at the same rate (2.5 per posting).

> **How?** Find a class mate's answer to an evaluation question in the previous week's Discussion Boards you wish to comment on, add to, disagree with, or somehow enlarge on. Write a post in the ECP Discussion Board (250 words minimum) engaging this student.
>
> Start your post by identifying the student by name and the posting's week by number, then very briefly summarize or quote the passage you wish to engage, finally articulate a comment, an objection or develop a question challenging the student's assertion, etc.
>
> Inform the students via course mail that his/her answer has been challenged. The student can respond to your challenge by his/her own post (250 words minimum) and also thus earn credit for one post (provided that the response contains new material, argument or data.
>
> **When?** The ECP Discussion Boards will open on May 25 (end of WEEK 1 and start of WEEK 2) and close on June 22 (end of WEEK 5).

Two Essays: 25 Points Each

Each student will write two essays of a least 1,500 original words each addressing **one** of the following questions:

> (1) Should prostitution be legalized?
> (2) Are immigration restrictions morally legitimate?
> (3) Is deepening economic inequality morally neutral and politically acceptable?
> (4) Should access to higher education be provided for free by the community to all academically qualified persons?

Exploring any of these questions will allow students to engage with the set of ideas introduced by Sandel and to apply them in new contexts.

This course is predicated on the notions that writing is a key component of the process of thinking and that conceptual revisions through re-writing are necessary for genuine academic exploration of ideas.

Students thus write the second essay on the same question as the first. The assigned readings for the first essay will be relatively simple. Students will receive faculty

feedback on their first essay before submitting their second essay. The assigned reading for the second essay will be relatively more demanding. Thus the first essay should be understood as a form of practice for writing a better thought-out second essay.

Students select a question by June 15.

The first essay is due on Thursday July 2 at 11:59pm, (middle of WEEK 7).

The second essay is due on Thursday July 16 at 11:59pm (middle of WEEK 9).

The essay must be submitted electronically to the Assignment Dropbox in Webcourses as an attachment in Word written in 12 points Arial font. It must use a standard reference system. It must have a minimum of 1,500 of your own words. Label your file with your last name.

The essay will be graded for clarity, logical consistency, cogency, coherence of structure, the accurate and effective mobilization of course concepts and ideas, the use of proper academic language, and proper rhetorical tone. A grading rubric will be circulated in due time.

Brainstorming the Essays (not graded)

To assist students in writing thoughtful essays, thematic Discussion Boards will open for students to raise questions about the assigned readings, articulate objections, test ideas, add supplemental data to the debate, etc. Instructor and teaching assistant will provide comments on postings, clarifying obscure points, evaluating objections, assessing data, etc. Students are also invited to comment.

Think of these thematic Discussion Boards as testing grounds for your essays. Posting are not graded so you will not lose points for submitting what may turn out to be a weak objection, an illogical reasoning, a misinterpretation of text, or an erroneous claim of fact.

Assessment Summary Table

WHAT	WHEN	POINTS
Quizzes	Weeks #1-4. by Monday Evenings 11:59 P.M.	25
Answers to Discussion Questions from weekly modules	Weeks #1-4. by Monday Evenings 11:59 P.M.	20
ECP Engaging class participants with respectful and well thought out criticism.	Weeks 2-5. In the Engaging Class Participants Discussion Boards in Webcourses	5 to 10
First Essay Minimum of 1,500 original words.	Thursday, July 2, evening at 11:59 P.M.	25
Second Essay Minimum of 1,500 original words on same question as the first essay (but with more assigned readings).	Thursday, July 16, evening at 11:59 P.M.	25

Course Schedule

Week #1, May 18-25: Introduction and Utilitarianism

- **On Monday, May 18 students read the Course Outline to familiarize themselves with the course's goals, content, structure, and expectations.**
    - **Every semester a small number of students does poorly or even fail courses simply because they did not read this key document carefully. Make sure you are not one of those.**
- **You will observe that Monday May 18 starts or "opens" Week 1.**
- **You will also observe that Monday May 25 ends or "closes" Week 1 and starts or "opens" Week 2. This chronological sequence is repeated during the first half of the semester.**

- **Read** Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* chapters 1-2.
- **Read** "The Queen v. Dudley and Stevens" in Webcourses, Under Files.

- **Take the Quiz** (before Monday morning, May 25 at 11:59 P.M.) covering the materials assigned for the week.
- **Post your answers** in the General WEEK 1 Discussion Board (before Monday May 25 at 11:59 P.M.) by answering the instructor's questions for this week. The instructor announces the discussion questions a week ahead of the submission deadline in the Module function of Webcourses.

Week #2, May 25- June 1: Libertarianism, Markets and Morals

- Read Sandel, chapters 3-4.

- Take the Quiz.
- Post your answers to discussion questions in the general WEEK 2 Discussion Board.

Week #3, June 1-8: Kant and Rawls: The Liberal Case for Equality

- Read Sandel, chapters 5-6.

- Take the Quiz.
- Post your answers to discussion questions in the general WEEK 3 Discussion Board.

Week #4, June 8-15: The Self, Justice and the Common Good

- Read Sandel, chapters 8-9-10.

- Take the Quiz.
- Post your answers in the general WEEK 4 Discussion Board.

Week #5, June 15-22: Brainstorming the First Essay I

- **Adopt an essay question!**

    - Read the four questions, scan the first document in each set of Assigned Readings (each question has its own set of assigned readings) to gain a better sense of what the question is about.
        - The assigned readings for the first essay will be made available in Webcourses, under Files.
    - Submit to the instructor your preferences for which question you would like to write essays on: first preference, second preference, etc.
        - Submit these preferences via course email. You will be assigned to a question soon thereafter. Check the Announcements function in Webcourses for updates on question assignments.

- **Read** the whole set of Assigned Readings relevant to the question you have been assigned to. Readings are available in Webcourses, under Files.
- **Post** interpretation of readings, questions, objections, etc. in your thematic Brainstorming the First Essay Discussion Board.
- **Read** postings from other students and faculty comments in this thematic Discussion Board, i.e. learn from other students' good moves and mistakes.
    - Are you in disagreement with a comment from the faculty or another student? Post the reason for your disagreement and read the responses. Etc.

Week #6, June 22-29: Brainstorming the First Essay II

- **Read** the whole set of Assigned Readings relevant to the question you have been assigned to. Readings are available in Webcourses, under Files.
- **Post** interpretation of readings, questions, objections, etc. in your thematic Brainstorming the First Essay Discussion Board.
- **Read** postings from other students and faculty comments in this thematic Discussion Board, i.e. learn from others' good moves and mistakes.
    - Are you in disagreement with a comment from the faculty or another student? Post the reason for your disagreement and read the responses. Etc.

Week #7, Thursday July 2: Submitting the First Essay

- Submit the first essay in the Assignment Dropbox as an attachment on Word, written in Arial 12 points. Label your file with your last name.
- Submit by July 2 at 11:59pm. Late submission will be penalized with point subtraction.

Week #8, July 6-13: Brainstorming the Second Essay I

- Take cognizance of the feedback on the first essays, yours and others.
- Read the new materials relevant to your questions now released in the Webcourses under Files.
- Post interpretation of readings, questions, objections, etc. in your thematic Brainstorming the Second Essay Discussion Board.

Week #9, Thursday July 16: Submitting the Second Essay

- Submit the first essay in the Assignment Dropbox as an attachment on Word, written in Arial 12 points. Label your file with your last name.
- Submit by July 2 at 11:59pm. Late submission will be penalized with point subtraction.

Grading Scale

Number- Letter Conversion Scale for the Final Course Grade	
94-100 %	A
90-93 %	A-
87-89 %	B+
84-86 %	B
80-83 %	B-
77-79 %	C+
74-76 %	C
70-73 %	C-
67-69 %	D+
64-66 %	D
60-63 %	D-
0 – 59 %	F

Grade Dissemination

- Scores for the various assessments will be recorded in the Canvas Grade Book.

- Keep in mind that the Canvas Grade Book is primitive, inflexible and can sometimes misrepresents your actual standing in the course. It is not easily adapted to different course designs. There is nothing the instructor can do about this.
- To gain an accurate picture of your standing in the course, enter your various scores in the formula specified by the course outline under Assessment Table:
    - your average quiz score;
    - your average discussion score;
    - your ECP score (over 5, but may include extra credit up to 10);
    - your first essay score;
    - your second essay score;
    - Then convert the arithmetical sum of all your scores to a letter grade using the scale specified in the course outline. *Et voilà!*

Course Policies

Late Work Policy:
There are no make-ups for missing weekly quizzes or weekly posting, or essays.

Grades of Incomplete

The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent semester or the "I" will automatically be recorded as an "F" on your transcript.

Course Policies: Technology and Media

Email:

Students are expected to regularly consult their Knight email and the Announcements function in Webcourses.

Use my email to communicate with me: Daniel.Marien@ucf.edu or through course email. Allow up to 48 hours for a response. Repeat message if you haven't received a response within 48 hours. Usually however, you will receive an answer the very same day.

Course Policies: Student Expectations

Disability Access:

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Academic Conduct Policy:

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook (http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/) for further details. As in all University courses, The Golden Rule Rules of Conduct will be applied. Violations of these rules will result in a failing grade for the entire course and can also result in expulsion from the University. Adepts of the copy and paste approach beware!

It is important that you paraphrase information borrowed from another author, that you do not claim a phrase or paragraph for your own when taken from another author, and that you do not insert too many quotes in your text. Perhaps 10-15% of your text can be made up of quotes, but no more. University education is meant to develop your own voice as an author. Copy and paste stifles the development of this important skill.

Turinitin.com:

In this course, the instructor reserves the right to utilize turnitin.com to verify that students did not plagiarize their answers to the discussion questions or the essay, or a contribution to Engaging Class Participants or any other text submitted for the purposes of earning academic credit in this course.