Politics 1020E: Introduction to Political Science

NOTE: POLITICS 1020E IS A FULL-YEAR ESSAY COURSE

First Term (Fall):

The first term introduces students to some of the central issues and ideas of politics. Consider some basic questions:

- Why do we need the state at all?
- Do we have a duty to obey the law?
- What is democracy and is it justified?
- How much liberty should citizens enjoy?
- What is a fair way to distribute wealth?

We examine these questions and analyze various answers. After that, we investigate the main political ideologies of the modern age, from liberalism, conservatism, and socialism, to feminism and environmentalism. You will learn how these ideologies purport to explain political phenomena, justify political action, and give you a sense of who you are and how you fit into the political world.

First Term (Winter):

In the second term, the focus shifts to key issues in global politics. Some questions we analyze include:

- What is the nation-state, and to what extent has it been surpassed by global politics?
- Why are dictators sticking around in what is supposed to be an age of democracy? How are they able to adapt to such changing circumstances as the development and diffusion of the new social media?
- What are the major democratic institutions and how do they shape the political process?
- How can 'politics matter' even in the face of broad frustration with our often stagnant and scandal-ridden democracies?
- What forms should popular engagement assume?
- What is the best way to cultivate security in a complex and difficult international environment?

We will address these and many other crucial issues that surface in the study of comparative politics and international relations.

Class Structure and Assignments

Politics 1020E involves two lectures per week with the professor, and one small-group tutorial per week led by a graduate student from the Political Science department. With the help of your tutorial leader, you will write one essay each term based on topics from class.