

Politics 2538G

Social Justice: The Just Society

Winter 2026

SSC-2024

Thursdays 11:30-1:20

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Office Hours: TBD

Course Outline

This course explores the question: what makes a society just? Must a society ensure equality in order to be just? What kind and for whom? The course attempts to answer these questions in the context of contemporary political issues including racism, sexism, global justice, historic injustice, immigration, and climate change. The focus will be on developing an understanding of the different answers to these questions, but also how to develop your own views of these matters: what do you think and, more importantly why? The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and lectures.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Understand and critically analyse key arguments with regard to theories of justice and equality

- Read, understand, analyse, and evaluate academic literature in political theory.

- Formulate your own considered opinions about various contemporary issues in political theory and express them coherently in writing.

Lectures will generally be high-level overviews of the topic of the week and introduce you to a variety of different views and arguments. This can be difficult at

first since there are no right or wrong answers. Please reach out if you are struggling in any way.

This year I will be allowing students to follow the course in a choice of two modalities. I will post pre-recorded videos and also give the lecture in person on Thursdays. You are welcome to follow the material solely online, solely in person, or both (but hopefully not neither!). An exception to this will be the first class of the term which will only be in person.

Textbook

Katherine Smits, *Applying Political Theory*

Textbook is available at the UWO Bookstore.

Assessments

Assessments are selected in order to let you demonstrate your mastery of all the learning outcomes in the course. Therefore, students must complete (not necessarily pass) each component of the course to be eligible to pass the course. This means that even if you obtain a mark of 50% or higher on all other components, failure to submit an assignment or write an exam (without academic consideration) precludes you from passing the course.

Tests (25% and 35%) - February 12 and April exam period

Multiple choice and short answer tests based on the readings and lectures. Test 1 will cover material from January 15 - February 5 (inclusive) and Test 2 will cover material from February 26 - March 26 (inclusive). If required, the make up tests will take place on February 27 and May 8.

Essay(s) (30%) - Due February 5 @ 9am and March 19 @ 9am. No penalties for late work until February 7 @ 9am and March 21 @ 9am respectively. No extensions will be provided beyond these dates (including undocumented absences) except as approved by academic counselling. Essays will not be accepted after February 12 and March 27 respectively.

You must submit two papers of 1000 words each. There are two assignment options and you can select whether you want to do one of each, or two of the same

option. Regardless of what option you select, the papers must be on different topics.

Option 1: Policy Paper

The government has finally realised that they need a political philosopher on staff. You are that person! Select a debate studied in the course (e.g., open/closed borders, exemptions for minorities, pornography as empowering/degrading) and write a recommendation about what they should do (e.g., open borders immediately, enact helmet exemptions for Sikhs, ban pornography). Your paper should briefly outline the debate, state your recommendation, and defend it with solid reasons. You must directly reference course material (e.g., lectures, readings). This can take the form of referencing the lecture itself, or reading the papers discussed in the lecture and referencing them directly. You should also research the topic beyond the assigned readings and reference at least 3 additional academic sources. See the professor or TAa if you have any questions about what constitutes sufficient referencing. Any citation style is acceptable so long as it is complete and consistent.

Option 2: Issue Analysis

Select an issue that is in the news and analyse it with reference to course material. For example, you might analyse whether Russia's war in Ukraine meets the criteria of just war theory, whether Canada's crackdown on temporary foreign workers is justifiable (morally speaking), or whether Gypsy Rose's imprisonment was justifiable given the purposes of purposes. These are just examples - the world is your oyster. But it is highly recommended that you run your idea past the instructor or TA. You must directly reference course material (e.g., lectures, readings). This can take the form of referencing the lecture itself, or reading the papers discussed in the lecture and referencing them directly. See the professor or TA if you have any questions about what constitutes sufficient referencing. Any citation style is acceptable.

Reflection Paper (10%) - Due March 30 at 10am (no late penalty until April 2 at 10am). No extensions will be provided beyond these dates except as approved by academic counselling. Reflections will not be accepted after April 7.

You will reflect on an issue or question about which you have changed your mind due to learning more about political theory. You can pick any topic/question covered in the course (or POL2537 if you have taken it). It could be that you have

come to completely change your opinion, or maybe you have the same opinion but for different reasons. Either way, in the assignment, you should:

Explain what opinion you held before and why;

Explain how it has changed and why;

Give specific examples from the course material (lectures, readings, etc.) and why you found it persuasive enough to change your view.

Your reflection can take a variety of formats so be creative (if you want to - essays are also fine). Previous students have done:

A 250-500 word essay

A short video or audio presentation

A GRWM video

A cartoon

A meme

If you choose to do a cartoon or meme, AI can be used to generate the pictures/artwork, but the ideas/text must be your own.

Late Submission of Work

Late work will accrue a penalty of 5% per day or part thereof. If you require an accommodation for medical, compassionate, or exam conflict reasons, you must contact academic counselling. You will only get an extension if it is approved by student counselling, and it will be for however many days they approve. For example, if the essay is due on the 20th, and you have an extension from the 20th to the 22nd, your essay will be due on the 22nd. If you are accommodated by academic counselling, you do not need to email me because instructors are sent an automatic notification from the counsellors.

Students who have the “flexibility with assignment deadlines” accommodation from Accessible Education do NOT need to email me. You must contact academic counselling to have an extension approved and it will be for a maximum of 3 days. Longer extensions will not be granted (unless the counsellors see fit). Having the “flexibility with assignment deadlines” accommodation does not apply to the date you write the tests.

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from lectures, or who fails to submit assignments, will be reported to the Chair of the

Political Science department and may be barred from writing the final examination (after due warning has been given).

Inclusivity

The course tackles topics that may be controversial and personal to some students. Members of this class are from a variety of different academic backgrounds, races, religions, etc., so whilst robust debate is encouraged, it must be done respectfully. If there are circumstances that might affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss strategies to accommodate your needs. This includes discussing whether some topics on the syllabus are particularly sensitive for you.

Email Etiquette

I will do my best to respond to emails received Monday-Friday 9am-5pm within 24 hours. Occasionally there will be delays in replies but if you do not hear back from me within 48 hours (Monday-Friday), please do resend your email as it might have been missed (professors receive a lot of emails!). Note that I rarely work on evenings, weekends, or holidays, so emails sent at those times will take longer to receive a reply. Before you fire off an email at 2am, check and double check this syllabus to see if your question is answered here - I may not respond to emails that ask questions about things that are answered here or in class announcements. Please also include POLISCI 2538 in the subject line so I know to which course you are referring since I teach more than one class each term.

SCHEDULE

January 8– Intro to the Course

January 15 - Global poverty & inequality

Applying Political Theory, ch. 11

James Christensen, Global Justice, ch. 3 and 4

January 22 – Immigration & Refugees

James Christensen, Global Justice, ch. 6

Ethics and World Politics, ch. 20

January 29 – Just war?

James Christensen, Global Justice, ch. 9

Applying Political Theory, ch. 12

February 5 – Crime and Punishment

Ethics and Pub Pol Ch 5.pdf

Issues in Political Theory ch 3.pdf

February 12 – Midterm Test

February 19 – READING WEEK

February 26 – Race & racism

W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races”

Applying Political Theory, ch. 4

March 5 – Sex & sexism

Contemporary Pol Phil ch 9.pdf

Applying Political Theory, ch. 5

March 12 – Future Generations & Climate Change

Axel Gosseries, What is Intergenerational Justice? ch. 3 & 4

March 19 –Reparations for historic injustice

Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy, ch. 17

March 26 – Multiculturalism, Religion & Politics

Applying Political Theory, ch. 3

This is Pol Philosophy ch 9.pdf

April 2 – Exam Review

[1] This means that if the assignment is due at 11:00am on January 1, submitting it at 11:01am January 1 and 10:59 January 2 will receive a 5% penalty. It also means that submitting it at 11:01am January 2 incurs a 10% penalty.