

**GVPT241 The Study of Political Philosophy: Ancient and Modern  
Fall 2009**

[3 Credits; GVPT Majors Only; Prerequisite: GVPT 100]

**Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30pm- 4:20pm; 2203 Art-Sociology Building**

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Professor Ian Ward

1147 Tydings Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30pm to 5:30pm & by appointment

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course examines key continuities and breaks between traditions in ancient and modern political philosophy. Special attention is given to figures addressing a recurring theme in the history of political thought: the ethical and political education of the young. Authors to be considered in this light include Plato, Niccolò Machiavelli, William Shakespeare, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ralph Waldo Ellison.

The principal goal of the course, aside from the attainment of introductory knowledge of these figures, is the development of two skills essential to serious undergraduate training in Government and Politics: (1) slow, scholarly reading, and (2) clear, analytical writing. The course readings, lectures, assignments and discussion sessions are all designed with these two skills in mind.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

- Regular Attendance at Lectures
- Responsible Participation in Discussion Sections: (20% of final course grade)
- Oral Presentations in Discussion Sections: (20% of final course grade)
- Three Short Writing Assignments:
  - (1) 3pp, **due October 1** (10% of final course grade)
  - (2) 7pp, **due November 5** (20% of final course grade)
  - (3) 10pp, **due December 14** (30% of final course grade)

## 1. Lectures

Regular attendance is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for success in this course. While I will not be taking attendance at lecture per se, all the other requirements of the course (i.e. participation in discussion sessions, oral presentations, and short papers) presuppose strong familiarity with what is discussed in lectures. Without this familiarity, students will not be able to satisfy these requirements.

## 2. Discussion Sections (20%)

The texts we will be reading are intensely demanding in their complexity. In texts of this kind, there is always more to be understood than can be grasped by a single reader in isolation. While reading the course texts and writing your short papers will be solitary activities, discussion sections are regular occasions for you and your fellow students to work together toward more adequate understanding of the week's readings.

Accordingly, students are expected to attend discussion sections regularly, to do the reading carefully in advance, and to participate responsibly. A student who fails to attend section without a legitimate excuse receives a failing grade for that session. Legitimate excuses include the observance of religious holidays (please notify me, in writing, by **September 14**) and issues of a medical nature. Please notify me, if possible, of legitimate absences in advance. Campus senate policy also requires that students who are absent due to illness/injury present written documentation verifying the illness/injury on the first day of class that you return to class. Attending section without participating counts as borderline performance (= D). The first week's session does not count toward the grade.

Oral contributions in discussion sections will be judged according to the following criteria:

- \* the degree to which they manifest genuine attention to, and understanding of, the material being discussed;
- \* the degree to which they succeed in advancing the discussion by responding meaningfully to what others have said; and
- \* the degree to which they articulate coherent, interesting, thoughtful, plausible, and original claims, questions, and arguments.

To earn an A for this component of the course, a student needs to participate regularly in the discussion and satisfy the above criteria in high degree. Regular participation, by itself, does not guarantee a high grade. For example, a student who participates regularly and seems to have read the assigned material, but does not demonstrate a good grasp of the ideas and arguments being discussed, and therefore does not contribute much of value to the discussion, would earn a C for seminar performance. Behavior that is disruptive or disrespectful of other students is considered *de facto* non-attendance (= F).

## 3. Oral Presentations (20%)

Starting in the second week of class, each section meeting will begin with a 5-10 minute oral presentation addressing the readings for that session. The presenter is expected to articulate a careful and interesting claim about the readings in a way that elicits thoughtful responses from other students. Each student will be responsible for 1 presentation during the term.

The most important criterion for evaluating oral presentations is the **quality of the section discussions they generate**. Generally speaking, presentations that **refer explicitly to specific passages of the text(s) under discussion** and raise **specific questions about the week's**

**reading** fare better on this score than those that do not. Presentations are also evaluated in accordance with the criteria for oral contributions given above.

#### 4. Three Short Writing Assignments (worth 10%, 20%, and 30% respectively)

These writing exercises are short, but very challenging. Each follows the same format: (1) approximately two weeks prior to the relevant due date, two highly specific questions about difficult passages from the course reading will be posted on the ELMS course website. (2) You will choose one of these questions and compose an answer that is as complete and precise as possible within the allotted length (**3 pages** for the paper due October 1, **7 pages** for the paper due **November 5**, **10 pages** for the paper due **December 14**). The increasing length and percentage value of each assignment reflects the increasing complexity of the questions you will be asked, as well as your increasing skill in answering them.

The exercises have a very specific point: to gauge and develop your ability to grasp nuanced, complex, and multi-layered ideas and to explain them as clearly and precisely as possible. They are not “personal reaction” pieces, research papers, or literature reviews. Instead, they are occasions for you to develop and refine the basic skills presupposed by these more complex forms of writing, which are important components of other GVPT courses.

More specific instructions for the writing assignments will be posted on the ELMS course website. Students observing religious days in the two-week periods prior to the paper due dates will receive appropriate accommodations **if they notify me in writing by September 14**.

#### **OTHER COURSE POLICIES**

- All students are expected to be familiar with the University's Academic Integrity Policies (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>).
- Students with special needs related to a disability should contact the Disability Support Service (<http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/>) as soon as possible to arrange appropriate accommodations. I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the DSS office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form which has been updated for the Fall 2009 semester. This form must be presented to me no later than October 1, 2009.
- Course evaluations: Students are encouraged to complete the online evaluation (available at [www.courseevalum.umd.edu](http://www.courseevalum.umd.edu)) at the end of the semester. The evaluation site will open on December 2, 2009.
- Personal Technology Devices. Use of Cellular Telephones, PDAs, etc. in class is strictly prohibited. Laptops are permitted, but for note-taking only.
- Grade concerns: students with concerns about the grades they have received for any component of the course should **first meet with the appropriate Graduate Teaching Assistant** to discuss. If the student is not satisfied with the assistant's explanation of the grade(s), she/he should then contact me.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

Required books available for purchase at the University Book Center:

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (ISBN 0872205541)  
Machiavelli, *The Prince* (ISBN 019280426X)  
Rousseau, *First and Second Discourses* (ISBN 0312694407)  
Ellison, *Invisible Man* (ISBN 0679732764)

Editions of these works will also be placed on reserve at McKeldin Library.

All other required readings (marked with an asterisk "\*\*") will be available on the Electronic Reserve or Course Documents sections of the ELMS course website.

This schedule is approximate; minor changes, if any, will be announced in class.

### Week One: Course Overview and Introduction

Tuesday, September 1  
Overview of Course Requirements

Thursday, September 3  
NO CLASS – Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association

### Week Two: The Politics of Piety

Tuesday, September 8  
Plato, *Euthyphro*, from *The Trial and Death of Socrates* (TDS)

Thursday, September 10  
*Euthyphro*

### Week Three: Corrupting the Youth

Tuesday, September 15  
Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, from TDS

Thursday, September 17  
*Apology of Socrates*  
**First Writing Assignment Questions Posted on ELMS**

### Week Four: Fidelity and Community

Tuesday, September 22  
Plato, *Crito*, from TDS

Thursday, September 24  
*Crito*

Week Five: Of Principalities and Princes

Tuesday, September 29  
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, dedicatory letter and parts I-IX

Thursday, October 1  
*The Prince*, parts X-XIV  
**First Writing Assignment due**

Week Six: Virtue and Fortune

Tuesday, October 6  
*The Prince*, parts XV-XIX

Thursday, October 8  
*The Prince*, parts XX-XXVI

Week Seven: Our Darker Purpose

Tuesday, October 13  
Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I\*

Thursday, October 15  
*Lear*, Act I\*

Week Eight: Reason not the Need

Tuesday, October 20  
*Lear*, Act II\*

Thursday, October 22  
*Lear*, Act III\*  
**Second Writing Assignment Questions Posted on ELMS**

Week Nine: Rule of the Fathers

Tuesday, October 27  
*Lear*, Act IV\*

Thursday, October 29  
*Lear*, Act V\*

Week Ten: Our Chains

Tuesday, November 3

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, from *First and Second Discourses* (FSD)

Thursday, November 5

*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

**Second Writing Assignment Due**

Week Eleven: The Garlands on our Chains

Tuesday, November 10

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, from FSD

Thursday, November 12

*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*

Week Twelve: Democratic Individuality

Tuesday, November 17

Emerson, "The American Scholar"\*

Thursday, November 19

Emerson, "Self-Reliance"\*

Week Thirteen: Democratic Perfectionism

Tuesday, November 24

Emerson, "Experience"\*

**Third Writing Assignment Questions Posted on ELMS**

Thursday, November 26

THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS

Week Fourteen: Democratic Invisibility

Tuesday, December 1

Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Introduction, Prologue, and Chapters 1-5

Thursday, December 3

*Invisible Man*, Chapters 6-13

Week Fifteen: The Politics of Democratic Piety

Tuesday, December 8  
*Invisible Man*, Chapters 14-20

Thursday, December 10  
*Invisible Man*, Chapters 21-25 and Prologue

**Third Writing Assignment Due December 14**