PS 100 Freshman seminar
Politics and Economics from Smith to Piketty
Tu-Th. 8:00-9:15 am
White 7111

Instructor: Geneviève Rousselière
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science

Email: rousseliere@wisc.edu

Office hours: Wednesday 9:00-10:00 and by appointment

I Course synopsis

This freshman seminar focuses on concepts and questions pertaining to the relation between politics and economics. It entails reading classical texts of political and economic philosophy from Locke to Piketty. The course asks whether economic structures influence, or ought to influence, political organizations and principles, and whether politics rightly understood involves, or ought to involve, regulating or transforming economic structures. It investigates the nature of the division of labor, the role of markets, the justification of private property, the invention of “market freedom”, the role of colonialism in the development of capitalism and the relation between freedom and equality. We will discuss the origins, nature and fairness of capitalism and analyze the relation between political liberalism and economic liberalism.

The course aims to provide students with critical tools to understand the historical background and the normative frame of contemporary issues in economics in order to take informed political positions on such issues.

II Learning outcomes

This is not a technical course requiring previous courses in economics or political science. Instead the course will provide both the skills for critical thinking in social sciences and humanities and the basic knowledge of key concepts and theories that may be useful to first-year students interested in majoring in any field of social sciences, as well as philosophy and history.

The course will focus on the development of the following skills:

- **Reading, analytical and interpretive skills.** By reading difficult books in their entirety, students are expected to learn to analyze highly theoretical works fast and well. Learning how to read means learning how to get the main claims of a book, the structure of its arguments, its main concepts, its rhetorical moves and its argumentative flaws.

- **Writing skills.** There will be three papers to write in this course. I will provide you with clear guidelines about how to write social sciences papers. You can take advantage of my office hours to discuss your paper ideas before its submission.
You are also welcome to make appointments with me to discuss strategies to improve your papers.

- **Argumentative skills.** While writing papers is key to developing your argumentative skills, presenting your ideas in class and learning to defend them against objections will be a central focus of this course. In class we will also focus on how to ask good questions and how to transform your argument or thesis when it turns out you’re not quite right. For this part of the course to be efficient, you need to come ready to participate to each and every session of the course.

- **Presentation skills.** You will have the opportunity of giving a presentation in this course as well as answering a Q&A following your presentation.

This course also aims to provide you with the historical and philosophical knowledge of economic and political concepts as well as classical theories in the history of political economy. By the end of the course you are expected to know how to define these concepts (market, equality, property, division of labor, etc.) as well as how to make arguments and counter-arguments about economic freedom, inequality, the role of the government in economics or the organization of labor.

You are also expected to know the doctrines of the main thinkers we study in this class, the basic historical context of their doctrine as well as the main arguments they used to build their theory.

**II. Requirements**

Requirements: 3 papers (4-5 pages) (60%); participation (30%); presentation (10%).

Detailed guidelines for paper writing will be given in class during the “Paper Writing Workshop.” Prompts will be provided about 10 days before the deadline. The final paper can be written either at home or in class (prompts will be different). Late papers will be penalized half a letter grade per day. If you have any questions, send me an email or talk to me after class.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be severely punished.

Guidelines for presentations are available on the class website. Presentations should be no more than 7 minutes and should focus on demonstrating one (non-obvious) thesis about the text assigned for class discussion this day. Presentations will be followed by a Q&A. The presenter will have to defend his/her position against objections (or transform his/her position if needed).

Participation is crucial in this class. A high grade for participation is given for constant, quality participation, which includes proposing textual interpretations, responding to other students’ questions and asking relevant questions.

Presence in class is a requirement. You can miss class once without having to provide an excuse. Missing class more than three times will jeopardize your grade in this course. If you need to miss class for an emergency or for religious reasons, let me know.
III. Books
All these books are available at the University Bookstore.

Karl Marx, Capital, volume I, Penguin Classics.
Proudhon, What is Property, Cambridge University Press.
Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, Free Press.

IV. Syllabus

Week 1
Jan. 19 Introduction

Jan. 21 A liberal theory of appropriation and property
Locke, Second Treatise on Government, Chapter V (PDF online)

Week 2
Jan. 26 Foundational concepts of political economy: division of labor, production, market, value

Jan. 28 The market and wages

Week 3
Feb. 2 Free trade and the invisible hand

Feb. 4 Paper Writing Workshop

Week 4
Feb. 9 Of colonies
Smith, Wealth of Nations vol. II, pp. 66-78; 83-105; 122-158.

Feb. 11 The expenses of the Sovereign or Commonwealth
Smith, Wealth of Nations, vol. II, 213-240; 244-48; 282-296; 301-309

* Paper 1 due on Saturday Feb, 13 @ 8 pm*
**Week 5**
Feb. 16 Foundational concepts: value and fetishism of the commodity

Feb. 18 Foundational concepts: capital and labor
Marx, *Capital*, Marx, *Capital*, ch. 4,6,7, & 8, pp. 247-257; 270-319

**Week 6**
Feb. 23 Theory of exploitation
Marx, *Capital*, ch. 9.1, & 9.2, 12-14, pp. 320-332; 429-491

Feb. 25 Machinery and large-scale industry
Marx, *Capital*, ch. 15.1-15.5, pp. 492-564

**Week 7**
March 1 The general law of capitalist accumulation
Marx, *Capital*, ch. 15.8 a-e, pp. 588-609; ch. 25.1-25.3, pp. 762-793

March 3 The logic of capitalist development
Marx, *Capital*, Ch. 26-28; 32-33, pp. 873-904; 927-940

**Week 8**
March 8 The division of labor in society

March 10 Crime and punishment
Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 57-104.

**Week 9**
March 15 Social evolution and the division of labor

March 17 The problem of anomie

**Week 10**
Break

* **Paper 2 due on Saturday, March 26 @ 8 pm***

**Week 11**
March 29 Property
Proudhon, *What is Property*, pp. 13-34; 67-99

March 31 Property
Proudhon, *What is Property*, pp. 170-217
Week 12
April 5 Conspicuous Consumption
Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 7-69

April 7 Conspicuous Consumption and Higher Education
Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 70-110; 236-259

Week 13
April 12 Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Introduction, Ch. I-IV, pp. 1-74
April 14 Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Ch. V-VIII, pp. 75-136

Week 14
April 19 Friedman *Capitalism and Freedom*, Ch. IX-Conclusion, p. 137-202

Week 15
April 28 Piketty *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 377-429

Week 16
May 3 Piketty *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 493-539; 571-7
May 5 In-class paper in lieu of final paper

* Paper 3 due on Saturday May 7, @ 8 pm*