I. Scope and Purpose

As the title indicates, this is a course centered on reading Machiavelli. Little needs to be said about why such a course is worthwhile for a student of political theory, Italian or English literature, social theory, or the early modern period. The fact that the same person could be dubbed (to name but a few) a teacher of evil, a republican, a democrat, a proto-feminist, and the murderous Machiavel – not to mention the devilish nickname Old Nick - means there is something interesting about his thought. Few thinkers have had such pronounced influence on subsequent political thought, and few thinkers have achieved as much fame – or infamy, deserved or not.

But the title itself is ambiguous, and it is meant to point in two directions. First, we will be reading Machiavelli in roughly chronological order – his major works (The Prince and The Discourses), along with some of the less frequently studied works (The Art of War, Mandragola, Clizia, and The Life of Castruccio Castracani). Second, we will be exploring different ways of reading Machiavelli – Straussian, Cambridge School, democratic, feminist, aesthetic, and so forth.

The course serves four main purposes. First and foremost, we will be studying several of the works of one of the most important political theorists. Second, we will be studying different ways of reading Machiavelli and, in doing so, explore how it is that we actually go about the business of being political theorists. Third, we will explore the strengths and weaknesses of different methodological and substantive approaches to Machiavelli. Fourth, and certainly not least, participants in this seminar will produce scholarly papers of their own, developing their own readings of Machiavelli and engaging Machiavelli scholarship.

II. Course Requirements

Students enrolled in the course for credit will write a staged seminar paper. The paper, along with the in-class presentations on May 2, will be worth 70% of the course grade. However, the paper will be broken up into the following stages:
1. Meeting with me to discuss the topic and a preliminary bibliography. To be completed no later than Monday, February 22.

2. A 6-8 page annotated bibliography, to be turned in to me or placed in my departmental mailbox by Monday, March 28. A representative from the Writing Center will visit class to discuss the assignment in advance of the due date.

3. A detailed outline of the paper (3-5 pages), to be turned in to me or placed in my departmental mailbox on or before Monday, April 11.

4. The final seminar paper (20-30 pages), to be turned in to me or placed in my departmental mailbox no later than Monday, April 25.

You will receive a grade for the paper as a whole, and not for the individual components, each of which is designed to help you produce a stronger paper. In order to receive credit for the paper, however, you need to complete each of the components.

The last two days of the course will be reserved for presentations of seminar papers. You should view this as, in essence, a practice conference presentation, and will be allotted 15 minutes to present your paper, after which I will offer approximately 5 minutes of comments. We will then have 15 to 20 minutes of class discussion of the papers. The goal of this exercise is both to familiarize you with the basics of presenting at conferences, to provide further feedback on your papers, and to further enrich the mutual learning experience of the seminar by incorporating peer feedback.

In addition to the seminar paper and presentation, participation will be worth 30% of the course grade. This involves closely and carefully reading the assigned material, and participating in seminar discussion. It also requires each participant to lead discussion once during the semester. This will involve identifying an argument or passage from the day’s reading that you find to be theoretically significant, interesting, or provocative, discussing the passage and its relationship to the broader arguments or themes of the day’s reading for roughly minutes, and then presenting three issues for discussion centered on that day’s reading.

Auditors will be expected to do all the readings and to lead one discussion during the semester.

III. Incompletes and Academic Dishonesty

Incompletes for this course will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will be subject to severe penalties.

IV. Texts

Five texts are required for this course, and are available for purchase at the University Book Store.

John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*


All articles can be obtained via library databases; all chapters and book sections (marked with an asterisk) will be available for download from Learn@UW at a later date.

V. Schedule of Readings and Discussions

Monday, 1/25: Course Introduction; Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli”

Required reading:

Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli”*

Monday, 2/1: *The Prince*

Required reading:

*The Prince*

Monday, 2/8: *Discourses*

Required reading:

*Discourses*, Books I and II

**PLEASE NOTE: We will begin class on September 16 at 2:00.**

Monday, 2/15: *Discourses*

Required reading:

*Discourses*, Book II, cont’d; Book III

Monday, 2/22: *The Art of War*

Required reading:

*The Art of War*

Monday, 3/7: Minor Works

Required Reading:

*Mandragola; The Life of Castruccio Castracani, Clizia*
Monday, 3/14: Machiavelli: Modern and/or Immoralist

Required reading:

Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?”*
Leo Strauss, “Machiavelli”*
Harvey Mansfield, “Machiavelli’s Virtue”*
Paul A. Rahe, “Situating Machiavelli”*

Suggested readings:

Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*
Harvey Mansfield, *New Modes and Orders*

3/21-25: Spring Break

Monday, 3/28: The Cambridge School and Republicanism

Required reading:

Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”*
Quentin Skinner, “Machiavelli on *Virtù* and the Maintenance of Liberty”*
Quentin Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty”*
Quentin Skinner, “Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas”
Maurizio Viroli, “The Power of Words” (Chapter from *Machiavelli)*

Suggested readings:

J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*
Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Volume 1

Monday, 4/4: Democratic Readings of Machiavelli

Required reading:

John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*
Michelle T. Clarke,

Monday, 4/11:
Required readings: Feminist Readings of Machiavelli

Selected chapters from Feminist Interpretations of Machiavelli*


Suggested reading:

Hanna Pitkin, Fortune is a Woman

Monday, 4/18: Machiavelli and the Ancients


Paul Rahe, “In the Shadow of Lucretius,” History of Political Thought, 2007

Alison Brown, “Machiavelli and the Influence of Lucretius,” in The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*

Daniel J. Kapust, “Acting the Princely Style,” Political Studies, 2010


Monday, 4/25: Irony, Trickery, Fraud, and Strategy

Required readings:


Mary Dietz, “Trapping the Prince,” American Political Science Review, 80.3, 1986


Monday, 5/2: Presentations