



# Introduction to Political Theory and Philosophy

**GVPT 241**

**Fall 2022**

## Description

Like the theoretical component of every science, political theory is the practice of providing provisional explanations to political phenomena. This function is the *empirical* aspect of political theory. But unlike other scientific theories, political theory has a *normative* function as well. It also makes claims about how concepts and values should guide political policy and action. For example, many governments around the world claim to be democratic in some way, even some authoritarian regimes that are clearly undemocratic. Some of them are being disingenuous. But others are working with a different conception of “democracy,” and these must be debated. The practice of political theory is 1) to understand how the concepts and values of politics *are* understood and utilized by citizens and political actors, and 2) to make arguments about how these concepts and values *should be* understood and used to guide political action. The USA was founded in part on the fundamental equality of all people. Does this mean that the practice of slavery should be tolerated by the state? Only the practice of political theory can answer this question.

This course is an introduction to a curated collection of topics and concepts in the practice of political theory. The primary goals are to get students to understand how the practice of political theory can explain and guide the practice of politics, and to get students to love political theory. Anyone who has opinions about the world is a political theorist, even if it is from your armchair. This course will make you a better one.

## Learning Outcomes

GVPT 241 is part of the Scholarship in Practice category of the [General Education](#) requirements of the University of Maryland. As such, by the end of the course students should be able to:

- *To understand the major theories and issues in the practice of political theory.*

**Dr Sujith Kumar**

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### Office Hours

Tues/Thurs  
Noon – 1PM  
and by appointment  
TYD 1153

### Live Lecture

Tues/Thurs  
2:00 – 2:50 PM  
LeFrak 2205

### Graduate Teaching Assistant

Pedro Abelin  
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### Teaching Assistants


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### Prerequisites

N/A

- *To apply the theories and concepts of political theory to contemporary political controversies.*
- *To critically assess the theories and concepts in political science.*
- *To practice working collaboratively with other students, and presenting that work.*

### Required Readings and Resources

	<p>Catriona McKinnon, Robert Jubb, Patrick Tomlin</p> <p>Print ISBN: 9780198784067</p> <p>eText ISBN: 9780192523174</p> <p><a href="#">UMD Bookstore</a></p>
<p>Other Readings</p>	<p>Made available through ELMS</p>

### Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland’s policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- [Academic integrity](#)
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- [Grades and appeals](#)
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit [www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html](http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html) for the Office of Undergraduate Studies’ full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

### Activities, Learning Assessments, & Expectations for Students

- Students are required to complete all of the readings, and are expected to attend the lectures in person.
- Students must keep on top of the reading, which will range from 40 – 80 pages per week.

- Students are required to attend their assigned Discussion Sections with questions and comments, and any other work prepared.
- Students will be assessed in weekly online discussions.
- Students will be assessed by 5 online quizzes throughout the semester.
- Students will also be assessed by a short writing assignment, and a group project.

### Course-Specific Policies

**The lateness penalty:** 10% of assignment grade after 1 day late, 5% after second day, 2% after third day, and then 1% of assignment grade for each additional day.

**Communication Policy:** Your UTAs are the first points of contact for course-related queries. They will also be keeping weekly office hours. Students may also contact Pedro or myself directly for whatever reason. For all email communications, please allow 24 hours for a reply, and up to 48 hours over the weekend.

**Absence Policy:** The University has returned to its normal absence policy, meaning students are able to miss one Discussion Section meeting without penalty. All other absences, medical or otherwise, must be accompanied with a note from an authority figure (doctor, employer) in order to be excused. If you are unwell and cannot attend your section, all effort must be made to inform your UTAs in advance. **All absences due to religious or official athletic engagements must be discussed** in advance, so that proper accommodations can be made, if necessary.

**COVID-19 Policies:** If you have symptoms of possible COVID, or test positive, you must contact UMD HEAL ([www.umd.edu/HEAL](http://www.umd.edu/HEAL), 301-405-4325) to report your case and receive instructions. If you must isolate, you will not be penalized for missing your Discussion Sections. You are also asked not to attend Lectures, which will be livestreamed and recorded and made available through our ELMS classroom.

*If I, or both of your discussion leaders, fall ill, then lectures or Discussion Sections will be conducted on Zoom.*

### Get Some Help!

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit [tutoring.umd.edu](http://tutoring.umd.edu) to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you. In particular, everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting [ter.ps/writing](http://ter.ps/writing) and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center. You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need (see [go.umd.edu/assistance](http://go.umd.edu/assistance)), and if you just need someone to talk to, visit [counseling.umd.edu](http://counseling.umd.edu) or [one of the many other resources on campus](#).



Most services are free because you have already paid for it, and **everyone needs help...** all you have to do is ask for it.

## Grades

Students will be assessed using the following assignments.

Learning Assessments	Points Each	Category Weight
Discussion Section Participation	100	10%
Online Discussions	100	20%
Quizzes	100	25%
Short Writing Assignment	100	15%
Group Project	100	30%

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%		
A	93.00%	B	83.00%	C	73.00%	D	63.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%		

## Course Schedule

<u>Week 1</u> Aug 30	<b><u>Intro and Political Obligation</u></b> Lecture
Sept 1	Lecture
Sept 2	Discussion Section
<u>Week 2</u> Sept 6	<b><u>Liberty: Positive vs Negative Freedom</u></b> Lecture
Sept 8	Lecture
Sept 9	Discussion Section
<u>Week 3</u> Sept 13	<b><u>Liberty II: Positive, Negative, and the Triadic Conception</u></b> Lecture
Sept 15	Lecture
Sept 16	Discussion Section
<u>Week 4</u> Sept 19	<b><u>Crime and Punishment</u></b> <b>Quiz 1 due</b>
Sept 20	Lecture
Sept 22	Lecture
Sept 23	<b>Research Skills Day</b>
<u>Week 5</u> Sept 27	<b><u>Toleration</u></b> Lecture
Sept 29	Lecture
Sept 30	Discussion Section
<u>Week 6</u> Oct 4	<b><u>Multiculturalism</u></b> Lecture
Oct 6	Lecture
Oct 7	Discussion Section
<u>Week 7</u> Oct 10	<b><u>Gender</u></b> <b>Quiz 2 due</b>

Oct 11	Lecture
Oct 13	Lecture
Oct 14	Discussion Section
<u>Week 8</u>	<b><u>Social Justice and Equality</u></b>
Oct 18	Lecture
Oct 20	Lecture
Oct 21	Discussion Section
<u>Week 9</u>	<b><u>Global Poverty</u></b>
Oct 25	Lecture
Oct 27	Lecture
Oct 28	Discussion Section
<u>Week 10</u>	<b><u>Human Rights</u></b>
Oct 31	<b>Quiz 3 due</b>
Nov 1	Lecture
Nov 3	Lecture
Nov 4	Discussion Section
<u>Week 11</u>	<b><u>Democracy</u></b>
Nov 8	Lecture
Nov 10	Lecture
Nov 11	Discussion Section
<u>Week 12</u>	<b><u>Sovereignty and Borders</u></b>
Nov 15	Lecture
Nov 17	Lecture
Nov 18	Discussion Section
<u>Week 13</u>	<b><u>Sovereignty and Borders Continued</u></b>
Nov 21	<b>Quiz 4 due</b>
Nov 22	Lecture

Nov 23 - 27	<b>Thanksgiving BREAK</b>
<u>Week 14</u> Nov 29	<b><u>War and Intervention</u></b> Lecture
Dec 1	Lecture
Dec 2	Discussion Section
<u>Week 15</u> Dec 6	<b><u>The Environment</u></b> Lecture
Dec 8	Lecture
Dec 9	Discussion Section
Dec 14	<b>Final Exams Begin</b>
TBD	<b>Quiz 5 due</b>