Title: Leadership and the Humanities: Classic Texts in Political Theory

Description of Course: This course provides an overview of concepts of leadership and power as it has been discussed in the history of political thought, with close attention to four foundational texts—Thomas Hobbes’s De Cive (On the Citizen), Plato’s Republic, Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy, and Tocqueville’s Democracy in America. We will also read two short novels: Voltaire’s Candide and Thomas More’s Utopia.

Briefly describe how the course will seek to achieve the five goals of the First Year Experience:

1. Expand students understanding of the world (e.g. state how the course will challenge students either to think about important questions and issues they may not have thought about before, or think about them in ways they have not thought about them).

Students will consider various views of the nature and justification of government and how these varying views correspond to different conceptions of human nature. A central question is how and why positions of leadership and authority should be distributed: for instance, does achievement of a good society require rule by a wise leader or leadership class? A central aim of the course is to help students understand why the idea of “democracy” remains a relatively novel idea in the history of political thought and to begin acquiring some appreciation of the difficulties of maintaining a system of popular self-rule.

2. Enhance their ability to read and think critically (e.g. a preliminary list of books and articles for the course and exercises or pedagogical methods that will be used to improve critical reading and thinking).

Students will be expected to closely read the texts noted above (see below for sequencing). Each of these texts are extremely rich in that they contain innumerable sharp, specific observations and also present large-scale, complex arguments that require some teasing out. We will pay equal attention to both aspects of these works during seminar discussions.

Introduction: Are We In the Best of All Possible Worlds?

Week 1: Voltaire, Candide


Hobbes, De Cive, trans. Tuck. (with very short excerpt from Leviathan as supplement)
Weeks 4-7: Plato


Week 8: Utopia?

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Weeks, 9-10: Machiavelli

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Mansfield. (selected excerpts TBA; with additional short excerpts from Livy’s History of Rome as appropriate)

Weeks 11-14: Democracy in America

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Mansfield (most of both volumes, pages TBA; supplementary assignments of the Constitution and selected Federalist Papers, i.e. #10)

3. Enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms (e.g. describe the type and number of writing assignments students will complete, the opportunities students will have to develop their writing skills, the kinds of questions they will address, the ways in which they will be asked to communicate their ideas, and the type of feedback students will receive).

Students will write a total of six papers of various lengths; two will be two pages; two will be five pages; and two will be eight pages. (Total 30 pages). The two page assignments correspond to the two novels; the five page assignments correspond to Hobbes and Machiavelli; and the eight page assignments correspond to Tocqueville. In short, we will complete two cycles of moving from two to five to eight page papers. In each paper students will be asked to respond to one (in some cases there will be a choice) question regarding a central theme of the assigned reading. Questions will be designed to as to require students both to accurately reconstruct the authors’ argument(s) and to require students to offer their own interpretation or evaluation of the argument and its persuasiveness. Emphasis will be placed on the need to develop a lucid writing style appropriate to arguments in political theory (i.e. making it perfectly clear what it is you are saying.) Long, rambling sentences that neither the reader nor likely the author can decipher are the enemy and generally the product of confused thought.

Class sessions will be discussion-based apart from background historical material I may provide, as well as help in tying together the large threads of the author’s argument. Since these are sprawling texts, to encourage students’ focus and participation I may in advance ask each student to focus on a particular voice or theme in these texts (i.e. have one student pay very close attention to everything Glaucon says in *The Republic*, while another pays attention to a different character.)

4. Develop fundamentals of information fluency and library research. Make time on your syllabus for students to complete the required library workshop outside of class and at
least one additional library-related assignment for the class. Indicate any additional ways in which students will make use of library resources.

Students will be given an assignment in which they are to choose one of the main course texts and identify at least eight books or journal articles published since 1990 which discuss the text. (i.e. find 8 books and articles about Plato’s Republic). Students will compile this list and provide a one or two-sentence summary of what the article or book is addressing. (I do not have in mind students will read the complete article or books they find; only that they look at them long enough to get a sense of what the topic and main themes are of each.) In short, they will be preparing mini-annotated bibliographies. This assignment will be given the same weight in course grades as the two-page papers.

5. Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor (e.g. Indicate specific efforts you will make to interact with each student, learn more about each student’s interests and abilities, and provide appropriate guidance for their intellectual growth.)

Each student will be required to meet with me at least once in the first month of the course outside of class. We may occasionally have class outings in which we continue our class discussions over food.

6. Briefly state your background for teaching this class:

I have a doctorate in political theory, and all these texts are standard parts of the political theory canon that I have taught in various iterations multiple times. I also have taught Foundations of Leadership Studies in different formats (LDST 101) for three years; have published an article on Plato on leadership; and have a work in progress (book chapter) concerning Tocqueville and statesmanship.