

# Introduction to Politics

POL 110:1200 • Writing Intensive  
Tuesdays & Thursdays  
12:30 pm – 1:45 pm, N468

POL 110:1400 • Writing Intensive  
Tuesdays & Thursdays  
2:00 pm – 3:15 pm, N468

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Spring 2017 • Borough of Manhattan  
Community College • The City University of  
New York • Department of Social Sciences

Office Hours: Wednesdays & Thursdays,  
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

## Description

Politics involves more than the activities of politicians, and learning about politics can involve more than watching television or reading the newspaper. This course introduces you to the study of politics by asking you to observe the public life of New York City today and at the same time to take a step back from your own experiences by adopting historical and comparative perspectives. Our readings and conversations will center on a cluster of key concepts: politics, public space, institutions, and organizations.

## Texts and resources

Some of the required course readings will be available on Electronic Reserve. These are indicated on the course schedule with the abbreviation “ERes”. To access those readings, go to [reserves.bmcc.cuny.edu](http://reserves.bmcc.cuny.edu) and when prompted use the password \_\_\_\_\_.

Students should buy the following books, which are available at the BMCC Bookstore.

- Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Hackett Publications, ISBN 9780872205710)
- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Penguin Classics, ISBN 9780140449150)
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Dover Publications, ISBN 9780486296029)
- Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (University of Oklahoma Press, ISBN 9780806136271)

In addition to the texts listed above, I also recommend that you own a copy of *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing* by Michael Harvey (ISBN 9781603848985) or another writing style guide as well as a good dictionary, such as the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, or the *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

## Assignments and evaluation

Your major writing assignments in this class will include reading responses, community observation reports, and an essay. In-class writing activities, mostly in the form of responses to your classmates' work, will also be a factor in your course grade.

### READING RESPONSES

At least eight times during the semester, you will bring to class a reading response: a short, informal paper of at least one full page (or about two pages if it's handwritten) in which you relate to, react to, or connect with our assigned reading for that day. A reading response paper should begin by quoting a specific passage from the assigned reading—say, a section of about two or three sentences. This should be a passage that caught your attention for some reason, perhaps because it seemed especially important, interesting, puzzling, or troubling. After quoting the passage, your reading response should present your thoughts, reactions, and questions.

Exactly what you write is up to you. You might want to explain what you think the passage means and why it matters, show what (if anything) makes it hard to understand, ask questions about it, share what personal experiences or previous knowledge the passage made you think of, or explore a problem or issue that the passage raises. A good reading response will honestly reflect your own approach to or reaction to the readings and will allow you to think on paper, as a preparation for our class discussions.

You may turn in a reading response on any day for which we have a reading assignment. A response to a particular assigned reading may *only* be turned in on the day that we are scheduled to discuss that reading in class. It is up to you to decide on which days to turn in reading responses, but I advise you to spread them out over the whole semester.

I will not assign grades to individual reading responses, but at the end of the semester I will assign an overall grade for your reading responses based on the number of responses you have satisfactorily completed. That grade will contribute 20% of your grade for the course.

### COMMUNITY OBSERVATION REPORTS

This series of assignments offers an opportunity for you to observe political life in New York today through the city's public spaces, government institutions, and citizen organizations. You will write three community observation reports, each at least three pages long, due on the dates indicated on the course schedule with the abbreviation "COR". Each time a report is due, we will take two class meetings to discuss your reports and the issues they raise. I will distribute detailed guidelines for these reports early in the semester. Your three community observation reports together will contribute 40% of your grade for the course.

## ESSAY

At the end of the semester, you will write an essay of about four or five pages, drawing on your observation reports as well as the assigned readings. I will distribute detailed guidelines for this essay late in the semester. On the second-to-last day of class, we will conduct a peer review exercise during our class time. On that day, bring two copies of your draft essay with you. I will provide instructions for a review exercise in which each student will comment on other students' draft essays. You will then be able to revise your essay in response to your peers' comments. Your essay will contribute 20% of your grade for the course.

## IN-CLASS WRITING ACTIVITIES

On the community observation report presentation days, the class days devoted to the topics "How to start writing an essay" and "How to finish writing an essay" (all indicated on the course schedule at the end of this syllabus), and a number of other occasions, you will respond in writing to your classmates' written projects or do other in-class writing activities. I will collect those writings, and at the end of the semester I will assign an overall grade for your in-class writing activities based on the number of these activities that you have satisfactorily completed. That grade will contribute 20% of your course grade.

## **Decorum and attendance**

I expect you to conduct yourself in a courteous and scholarly manner, to attend every class session, to arrive on time (that is, *before* the time the class is scheduled to begin), and to bring with you to class note-taking materials, this syllabus, and the assigned readings for that day. Turn off cell phones and similar devices during class.

I will do you the courtesy of trusting that you will act responsibly and will miss class only if truly necessary; I ask that you do me the courtesy of living up to that expectation. Thus I am not interested in making distinctions between excused and unexcused absences, and I will not generally need to see doctors' notes and the like. However, in extreme cases I reserve the right to apply the college's attendance policy:

The maximum number of absence hours is limited to one more class hour than the contact hours as indicated in the BMCC college catalog. For example, you may be enrolled in a four hour class that meets four times a week. You are allowed five hours of absence, not five days. In the case of excessive absence, the instructor has the option to lower the grade or assign an "F" or "WU" grade.

My policy in this course will be that any student who misses more than one third of the class sessions (that is, ten or more) for any reason or who is late repeatedly to an extent that I consider equivalent will receive a failing grade for the course. I am not likely to make exceptions to this policy, but if you think your case merits an exception it is *your* responsibility to discuss your situation with me as soon as you realize that you have or might have an attendance problem.

## How to do well in this class

### READ ACTIVELY

Take your time with the readings for this class. Don't get bogged down in details or tough passages. Instead, read with an eye toward the course's larger themes. As you read, take notes and look up words in your dictionary.

### PARTICIPATE IN CLASS

Come to class with questions, and ask them. Listen to your classmates and respond to their ideas. Take lots of notes. Give your full attention to in-class writing activities.

### GET AN EARLY START ON YOUR WRITING PROJECTS

Good writing involves (1) active reading or careful observation as well as participation in discussion, (2) open-minded exploratory writing, (3) a solid first draft, (4) multiple revisions, and (5) a final proofreading. This takes time.

### DO YOUR WORK WITH INTEGRITY

Here is a BMCC statement regarding the college policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic/scientific/technical work as one's own creation. A student who copies or paraphrases published or on-line material, or another person's research, without properly identifying the source(s) is committing plagiarism.

Plagiarism violates the ethical and academic standards of our college. Students will be held responsible for such violations, even when unintentional. To avoid unintended plagiarism, students should consult with their instructors about when and how to document their sources. The library also has both print and digital guides designed to help students cite sources correctly.

Plagiarism carries a range of penalties commensurate with severity of the infraction. The instructor may, for example, require the work to be redone, reduce the course grade, fail the student in the course, or refer the case to the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee (see Article 15.4 of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees). Cases referred to that committee could result in suspension or expulsion from the college.

I am not merciful toward students who violate this policy. If one of your essays or reports includes text that you have not written but have presented as if it were your own writing, you can expect repercussions, possibly in the form of a failing grade for the assignment or even for the course.

### ASK FOR HELP

The best time to find me in my office will be during my scheduled office hours, which are listed on the first page of this syllabus. I will often be on campus at other times and on other days as well. If

you contact me by email, give your message a subject heading and use a letter format including a proper salutation, complete sentences with standard spelling and capitalization, and an appropriate closing including your full name.

If for any reason you are having trouble completing the assignments in this course, please let me know as soon as possible. If you contact me well before a due date, I will in certain circumstances be open to granting you a deadline extension or making other appropriate arrangements to make sure that you are able to do your best on the assignments. If, however, you try to offer excuses for late or missing work *after* it is due, I will not be as sympathetic.

Also, please note the BMCC policy on academic adjustments for students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations or academic adjustments for this course must contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. BMCC is committed to providing equal access to all programs and curricula to all students.

Let me know if you have questions about any of this.

## **Miscellany**

Students in this course will use a range of sources and methods to interpret and analyze political affairs; define and discuss key political concepts, using them to make judgments about political questions; compare contexts and eras, constructing plausible generalizations; and discuss, compare, contrast, and evaluate political arguments. The assignments you complete will reflect your progress toward these goals, and will allow you to progress toward BMCC's general education goals in the areas of communications skills, social and behavioral sciences, arts and humanities, and values.

Note that this is a Writing Intensive (WI) course that fulfills the WI requirement for graduation. The WI program has issued the following description of BMCC WI classes.

Writing intensive courses pay special attention to developing critical reading, writing, and analytic skills to prepare students for college-level coursework in general. Both informal and formal writing will be designed to maximize your understanding of the subject matter. Formal writing assignments, at least 10-12 pages total, account for a significant portion of your grade and will include opportunities for revision.

In every BMCC WI class, the WI program expects that students will be able to

- complete (a) formal writing assignment(s) of at least 10-12 pages in length that has/have gone through the revision process (e.g. research paper, content-related report, essay), and
- generate pieces of informal writing in response to a variety of prompts, concepts, situations or reading assignments.

## Schedule

### PART 1: PUBLIC SPACE

- Tu 1/31 Introduction to the study of politics
- Th 2/2 Walzer, "Pleasures & Costs of Urbanity" (ERes)
- Tu 2/7 Gates, "Athens in the fifth century BC" (ERes)
- Th 2/9 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 1-440 (pp. 1-18)
- Tu 2/14 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 441-780 (pp. 18-34)
- Th 2/16 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 781-1353 (pp. 35-58)
- Tu 2/21 Thucydides, "The Funeral Oration of Pericles" (ERes)
- Th 2/23 Observing public space \* COR 1 due \*
- Tu 2/28 Observing public space, continued

### PART 2: INSTITUTIONS

- Th 3/2 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, "Letter" and Chapters 1, 8, & 9 (pp. 3-7, 28-35)
- Tu 3/7 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 15-19 (pp. 50-67)
- Th 3/9 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 20-21 (pp. 67-74)
- Tu 3/14 Paine, *Common Sense*, "Introduction" and "Of the Origin and Design of Government"
- Th 3/16 Paine, *Common Sense*, "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs"
- Tu 3/21 Madison, *Federalist* 14 (ERes)
- Th 3/23 Constant, "Ancient and Modern Liberty" (ERes)
- Tu 3/28 Observing institutions \* COR 2 due \*
- Th 3/30 Observing institutions, continued

### PART 3: ORGANIZATIONS

- Tu 4/4 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 1
- Th 4/6 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 3, pp. 74-98
- Tu 4/25 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 3, pp. 98-126
- Th 4/27 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 4, pp. 127-152
- Tu 5/2 Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, Chapter 4, pp. 152-174; Chapter 7, pp. 265-276
- Th 5/4 How to start writing an essay
- Tu 5/9 Observing organizations \* COR 3 due \*
- Th 5/11 Observing organizations, continued
- Tu 5/16 How to finish writing an essay \* Two copies of draft essay due \*
- Th 5/18 Concluding discussion

ESSAY DUE in my mailbox in the Social Sciences Department (N651) by 4:00 pm on Tuesday, 5/23.