

POS 4931/LAS4935: Political Theory and Public Affairs

University of Florida

Spring 2026

Instructor:	Cristian Pérez Muñoz
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Office	Anderson 334
Class Hours	Tuesdays (10:40 AM - 11:30 AM) and Thursdays (10:40 AM-12:35 PM)
Classroom	AND 0034
Office Hours	Mondays (10 am–1 pm) (by appointment)

Course Description

What is wrong, if anything, with residential segregation? Should people have the right to determine their own food systems, or is ensuring adequate food access sufficient? How should competing claims over land between different groups (farmers, indigenous peoples, corporations) be resolved? Do indigenous communities have the right to veto the expansion of oil, mining, and energy businesses? Is economic growth desirable? Should punishment reduction be employed to influence perpetrators to cooperate with authorities in confronting the problem of disappeared persons in transitional justice contexts? On what grounds can states claim Antarctic territory? What constitutes a just energy system? Should we be concerned about informality and the underground economy? How can we define the demos of a given political community?

In this class, we will approach these and other normative questions through the methodological and substantive inputs of political theory. We will engage in exercises of applied political theory, in which conceptual and normative analysis will be informed by empirical research. In particular, our focus will be mostly centered on studying pressing issues occurring in Latin America. This regional focus will help us contextualize and elaborate specific theoretical answers to the problems at hand. Likewise, we will aim to learn from these different contexts and understand their relevance and adaptability to other settings and circumstances.

Course Objectives:

- Learn to identify and analyze complex theoretical arguments
- Apply analytical tools to address controversial issues and make informed choices about them.

- Learn to use comparative and applied methods in political theory

Course Requirements

This course will have three instances of evaluation. The characteristics of each instance of evaluation are explained below.

1. **Participation:** Students are expected to come to class with the readings completed and prepared for discussion. Absence will adversely affect your participation grade. Participation in class discussions will be evaluated in terms of quality and quantity. Participation will represent **30% of the final grade**.
2. **Short essays:** Each student must write three brief essays (One page, single-spaced, Times New Roman). Essays will address a normative problem selected by each student. More information about the format of the essay will be provided in class. The deadlines for submission of short essays are: first (Tuesday, 02/10), second (Tuesday 03/10) and (Tuesday 04/07). Note: short essays cannot be submitted beyond these deadlines. They will represent **45% of the final grade (15%) each**.
3. **Final paper:** The final paper will have to be 2000-3000 words long (single spaced, times new Roman 12 or equivalent). The academic paper should analyze one of the normative problems discussed in class, identify alternative views to address that problem, and evaluate potential solutions. Further details of how to write this assignment will be given to you in class and on the course website. **25% of the final grade. Final paper is due on Friday, April 25, 2026**

Grade Distribution:

Class participation	30%
Short essays	45%
Final Paper	25%

Letter Grade Distribution:

>= 94	A	74 - 76	C
90 - 93	A-	70 - 73	C-
87 - 89	B+	67 - 69	D+
84 - 86	B	64 - 66	D
80 - 83	B-	60 - 63	D-
77 - 79	C+	<61	F

Important Dates Summary:

- **First Class:** Tuesday, January 13, 2026
- **First Short Essay Due:** Tuesday, February 10, 2026
- **Second Short Essay Due:** Tuesday, March 10, 2026
- **Spring Break:** March 17-21, 2026 (No Classes)
- **Third Short Essay Due:** Tuesday, April 7, 2026
- **Last Class:** Tuesday, April 21, 2026
- **Final Paper Due:** Friday, April 25, 2026

Course Policies¹**Class Modality**

This class will be offered on campus. You will be notified in advance in case we need to move the class to an online setting. However, this will be only in exceptional circumstances (i.e. a global pandemic).

During Class

Unless I explicitly declare so, nothing I say in this class will be my personal opinion on the topics covered. Instead, I will focus on presenting different points of view on the topics discussed. When issuing a subjective opinion on a given issue, students will hear me say something along the lines of "I personally believe," "according to how I see this issue," and so on. In any case, my personal opinions will be announced and infrequent.

I have carefully chosen a manageable number of readings and references that come from academic sources. These viewpoints have been discussed and debated within political science or other academic disciplines and have been collectively judged by experts in that field to be well-argued and rigorous.

While I have chosen a wide range of viewpoints to present to you, it would be impossible to show all viewpoints on all issues. The debate in class will help us to identify, address and evaluate any alternative perspective on the topics covered in class.

We are a diverse group of people, and every one of us has different opinions. It is crucial to treat your instructor and classmates with respect and kindness during class meetings and activities. For more information on netiquette guidelines, see the [UF Netiquette Guide for Online Courses](#).

¹The items with an asterisk(*) are textually copied from [UF Policy on Course Syllabi](#).

AI tools and Writing assignments*

This course recognizes the evolving phenomenon of using artificial intelligence (AI) tools in academic research and writing. This syllabus emphasizes the importance of original thought, critical analysis, and teacher-student interaction to ensure the integrity and educational value of writing assignments.

- *Original Thought and Critical Analysis:* Students are expected to develop their own ideas and arguments in their essays. AI tools may assist in refining these ideas, but the core analysis and argumentation must be the student's own work.
- *Teacher-Student Interaction:* Students are encouraged to engage actively with the instructor about their essay writing process. This includes discussing the development of their essay, their understanding of the topic, and the analytical approach taken. Such interactions are vital for fostering a deeper understanding and ensuring the authenticity of the student's work.
- *Use of AI Tools:* While AI can be a valuable tool for certain aspects of writing, such as grammar checking or initial research, it should not be used to generate substantial parts of the essay. Students should use AI responsibly and in a manner that supports their own learning and intellectual growth.

Attendance Policy*

Attendance at all classes is mandatory and will be registered. A penalty of one point will be subtracted from the final grade for each unexcused absence. Late work is not accepted. Exceptions include documented illness, legal, or civic/university duty situations. If you miss an assignment and have a valid excuse, please email me within the same week to evaluate the situation and eventually arrange a makeup. "The requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies". [Click here to read the university attendance policies.](#)

Recording*

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Student Privacy*

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the Notification to Students of FERPA Rights.

Software Use*

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Academic Integrity and Honesty*

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment. The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Accommodations for Disabilities*

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Online Course Evaluation*

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner.](#) Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluer.a.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students [here](#).

Technical Support*

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Health and Wellness*

- U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care](#) website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Disclaimer

The syllabus is a statement of intent. Please note that the schedule of activities and procedures in this course are subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. Any change in the syllabus will be communicated to all students in the class. Changes will be posted on Canvas and announced in class.

Course Outline

Readings: All the required readings are available in [Canvas](#). The following are some recommended readings that can further your understanding on some of the topics we will address in class.

- Julia Driver. 2010. *Ethics: The Fundamentals*. John Wiley and Sons.

- Will Kymlicka. 2002. *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Andrew Cohen. 2015. *Philosophy, ethics, and public policy: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Jonathan Wolff. 2019. *Ethics and public policy: a philosophical inquiry*. Routledge.
- David Leopold and Marc Stears, eds. 2008. *Political theory: Methods and approaches*. Oxford University Press.
- Adrian Blau. ed. 2017. *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Week	Content/Reading assignments
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction: Political theory as a tool for political analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (01/13)</u> – Jonathan Wolff. 2018. "Method in philosophy and public policy: Applied philosophy versus engaged philosophy." <i>The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and Public Policy</i>. Routledge, 2018. 13-24. – <u>Thursday (01/15)</u> – Adam Swift and Stuart White. 2008. "Political theory, social science, and real politics." In David Leopold and Marc Stears (edit) <i>Political Theory: Methods and Approaches</i>, Oxford University Press. – Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift. 2012. "Ideal and nonideal theory." <i>The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy</i>, pp. 373–389.
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (01/20)</u> – Alejandra Mancilla. 2018. "The moral limits of territorial claims in Antarctica." <i>Ethics and International Affairs</i> 32 (3) (2018): 339–360. – <u>Thursday (01/22)</u> – Margaret Moore. 2020. "Territorial Rights in Unoccupied Places." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> (2020). – Avery Kolers. 2017. "Latin America in Theories of Territorial Rights." <i>Revista de Ciencia Política</i> 37 (3): 737–753.
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional Divergence and Convergence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (01/27)</u> – Joshua Simon. 2014. "The Americas' more perfect unions: New institutional insights from comparative political theory." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 12.4 (2014): 808-828. – <u>Thursday (01/29)</u> – Gabriel Negretto and José Antonio Aguilar Rivera. 2000. "Rethinking the legacy of the liberal state in Latin America: The cases of Argentina (1853–1916) and Mexico (1857–1910)." <i>Journal of Latin American Studies</i> 32 (2): 361–397. – Paulina Ochoa Espejo. 2012. "Paradoxes of popular sovereignty: A view from Spanish America." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 74 (4): 1053-1065.

Week	Content/Reading assignments
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (02/03)</u> – Heffron, Raphael J., and Darren McCauley. "The concept of energy justice across the disciplines." <i>Energy policy</i> 105 (2017): 658-667. – Lacey-Barnacle, Max, Rosie Robison, and Chris Foulds. "Energy justice in the developing world: a review of theoretical frameworks, key research themes and policy implications." <i>Energy for Sustainable Development</i> 55 (2020): 122-138. – <u>Thursday (02/05)</u> – Wood, Nathan. "Problematising energy justice: Towards conceptual and normative alignment." <i>Energy Research & Social Science</i> 97 (2023): 102993. – Alegre-Bravo, Alonso, Richard C. Stedman, and C. Lindsay Anderson. "Rethinking the role of indicators for electricity access in Latin America: Towards energy justice." <i>Applied Energy</i> 379 (2025): 12487
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (02/10)</u> – Alisha Holland. 2017. <i>Forbearance as redistribution: The politics of informal welfare in Latin America</i>. Cambridge University Press, 2017. (Chapter 1, pp.12-40) – <u>Thursday (02/12)</u> – Richard Epstein.1993. "The Moral and Practical Dilemmas of an Underground Economy Symposium: The Informal Economy". <i>Yale Law Journal</i> 103: 2157–2178. – George L Priest. 1993."The ambiguous moral foundations of the underground economy". <i>Yale Law Journal</i> 103: 2259.
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential segregation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (02/17)</u> – Iris Marion Young. "Residential segregation and differentiated citizenship". <i>Citizenship Studies</i>, 3 (2):237–252. – <u>Thursday (02/19)</u> – María José Álvarez-Rivadulla. 2007. "Golden ghettos: gated communities and class residential segregation in Montevideo, Uruguay". <i>Environment and Planning</i>, 39(1):47–63. – Bart Van Leeuwen. 2010. "Dealing with urban diversity: Promises and challenges of city life for intercultural citizenship." <i>Political theory</i> 38 (5): 631–657.

Week	Content/Reading assignments
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Sovereignty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (02/24)</u> – Araujo, Saulo. "The promise and challenges of food sovereignty policies in Latin America." <i>Yale Hum. Rts. & Dev. LJ</i> 13 (2010): 493. – Agarwal, B. (2014) Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: Critical contradictions, difficult conciliations. <i>The Journal of Peasant Studies</i>, 41(6), 1247–1268. – <u>Thursday (02/26)</u> – Hospes, O. (2014) "Food sovereignty: The debate, the deadlock, and a suggested detour". <i>Agriculture and Human Values</i> (2014) 31: 119. – Patel, R. (2009) Food sovereignty. <i>Journal of Peasant Studies</i>, 36(3), 663–706.
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence and Organized Crime <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (03/03)</u> – Angelica Duran-Martinez. 2023. "Large-Scale Criminal Violence in the 21st Century", In the <i>Routledge Handbook of the Future of Warfare</i>, edited by Artur Gruszczak and Sebastian Kaemp, pp. 421-431. – <u>Thursday (03/05)</u> – Benjamin Lessing. 2020. "Conceptualizing Criminal Governance", <i>Perspectives on Politics</i>, 19(3): 854–73. July 2020. – Pablo Kalmanovitz. 2023. "Can criminal organizations be non-State parties to armed conflict?". <i>International Review of the Red Cross</i>, 105(923), pp.618-636.
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (03/10)</u> – Jon Elster. 2004. "Moral Dilemmas of Transitional Justice." In <i>Practical Contexts: New Philosophical Essays</i>, edited by Peter Baumann and Monica Betzler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 295–315 – <u>Thursday (03/12)</u> – Juan Espindola. 2021. "Bargaining for the disappeared? Rewarding perpetrators in transitional justice contexts." <i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i> (2021). – Eric Posner and Adrian Vermeule. 2004. "Transitional justice as ordinary justice." <i>Harvard Law Review</i> 117(3): 761–825.

Week	Content/Reading assignments
Week 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Break - No Classes (03/17 - 03/21)
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Innovations and Citizen Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (03/24)</u> – Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright. 2001. "Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance." <i>Politics and Society</i> 29.1 (2001): 5–41. – <u>Thursday (03/26)</u> – Carole Pateman. 2012. "Participatory democracy revisited." <i>Perspectives on politics</i> 10 (1): 7–19. – Thamy Pogrebinski. 2018 "Deliberative Democracy in Latin America." In <i>The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy</i> Edited by André Bächtiger, John S. Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, and Mark E. Warren, pp. 828–841.
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (03/31)</u> – Eduardo Gudynas. 2011. "Buen Vivir: today's tomorrow." <i>Development</i> 54 (4): 441–447. – Thomas Heyd. 2004. "Themes in Latin American environmental ethics: community, resistance and autonomy." <i>Environmental Values</i> 13(2): 223–242. – <u>Thursday (04/02)</u> – Unai Villalba. 2013. "Buen Vivir vs Development: a paradigm shift in the Andes?." <i>Third World Quarterly</i> 34 (8): 1427–1442. – Roy H May Jr. 2017. "Pachasophy: landscape ethics in the Central Andes mountains of South America." <i>Environmental Ethics</i> 39 (3): 301–319.

Week	Content/Reading assignments
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic growth and neo-extractivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (04/07)</u> – Julie L Rose. 2020. "On the value of economic growth." <i>Politics, Philosophy and Economics</i> 19 (2): 128–153. – <u>Thursday (04/09)</u> – David Plunkett. 2021. "The varieties of idealization and the politics of economic growth: a case study on modality and the methodology of normative political philosophy." <i>Inquiry</i> (2021): 1-39. – William Galston. 2014. <i>The New Challenge to Market Democracies: The Political and Social Costs of Economic Stagnation</i>. Brookings Institution Press, 2014.
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption and Clientelism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (04/14)</u> – Bo Rothstein. 2014. "What is the opposite of corruption?", <i>Third World Quarterly</i>, 35:5, 737–752, – <u>Thursday (04/16)</u> – Emmanuela Ceva and Maria Ferretti. 2017. "Political corruption". <i>Philosophy Compass</i>.12.
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Tuesday (04/21)</u> – Final discussions and semester wrap-up