



SLO Assessment Cycle for POLI 5

Introduction to Political Thought and Theory

Assessment Initiated by: [Robert Stockwell](#) (8382) in POLI

Outcomes:

Outcome 1: Statement

Students will evaluate the major paradigms of political thought filtered through views on human nature and the good society.

Assessment Cycle Records:

Outcome 1: Assessment Planning Modified: [06/19/2011]

Assessment Strategy Used:

Quarter: Winter 2011

Assessors: Robert Stockwell

Assessment Tools: Exams • Papers/Essays

Sections being assessed: 01

Outcome 1: Reflect & Enhance Modified: [06/19/2011]

Number of people involved in Reflection and Enhancement: 1

Changes:

This is the first time that Poli 5, Introduction to Political Theory and Thought, has been assessed by the Political Science Department.

Methods:

The main assessment tools used for the class during winter quarter 2011 were writing assignments (2) and exams (a midterm and a final).

The first writing assignment asked students (44 in total) to evaluate one of the following readings and to describe (1) the author's main idea(s) (thesis); (2) the evidence/argumentation used to support the thesis(es); and (3) evaluate the strengths/weaknesses of the position developed.

The readings from which they could choose included:

Thomas Hobbes, "The State of Nature and the Basis of Obligation"

John Locke, "Toleration and Government"

Thomas Paine, "Government, Rights, and the Freedom of Generations"

T.H.Green, "Liberalism and Positive Freedom"

Terence Ball, "A Libertarian Utopia"

The second writing assignment addressed the following possible readings:

Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Steve Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity"

Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"

Marilyn Frye, "Oppression"

John Corvino, "Homosexuality: The Nature and Harm Arguments"

Taiiaki Alfred, "Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom"

Peter Singer, "All Animals are Equal"

Dave Foreman, "Putting the Earth First"

Vandana Shiva, "Women in Nature"

James Cone, "Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?"

Ayatollah Khomeini, "The Necessity For Islamic Government"

The midterm covered ideology theorized, Democracy, Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism/Communism: More to Marx, and consisted of multiple choice and short answer/essay questions.

Students were required to review key terms/themes and possible essay questions.

Ideology = ideology and human nature; ideology as revolutionary movement; empirical vs. normative; ideological functions (explanation, evaluation, orientation, program); triadic model of freedom; "essentially contested" concepts (freedom and democracy); revolution; nationalism; anarchism

Democracy = original meaning; Plato, Aristotle, de Tocqueville and democracy; republican tradition; 20th century conceptions; democracy as an ideal; different ideological conceptions of democracy

Liberalism = feudalism, religious conformity, and ascribed status; natural rights; social contract; individualism; free-market capitalism; the

state; tyranny of the majority; Rawls; T.H.Green, Social Darwinists; libertarianism; negative and positive liberty; welfare/reform liberalism; liberal democracy; affirmative action

Conservatism = good society; organic view of society; politics of imperfection; classical/traditional conservatives; Burke and freedom, democracy; reform; prejudice (prejudgement); representative government vs. direct democracy; natural aristocracy; little platoons (civil society); leveling; mass society; reactionaries; individualistic/modern conservatism; neoconservatives; religious right conservatives

Socialism/Communism (SCMM) = socialism; human nature; freedom; socialism of Karl Marx; influence of Hegel; materialist conception of history; class; Marx's critique of capitalism; revolutionary sequence; communism

Possible short answer/essay questions included:

1. (a) What four functions do ideologies perform? Describe each in turn. (b) Why is some conception of human nature and freedom so important to political ideologies? (c) In what ways is an ideology similar to, and in what ways different from, a scientific theory or a religion?
2. (a) What is the triadic model of freedom? (b) What are its parts and (c) how can they be used to analyze ideologies?
3. Why were the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle convinced that democracy (i.e., rule by the many in the interests of the many) was a bad form of government? On what grounds did they base their reasoning?
4. (a) What were the three principal conceptions of democracy in the twentieth century? (b) How do they differ from one another, and (c) which, in your view, is the best way of thinking about democracy?
5. Ball and Dagger maintain democracy is not an ideology but an ideal. (a) What do they mean and (b) do you agree? (c) What does it mean to say that "freedom" and "democracy" are "essentially contested" concepts?
6. (a) What is the distinction between negative and positive liberty (freedom)? If we assume the core of liberalism is its commitment to equality of opportunity in a competitive society, (b) how do we explain the ideological differences between classical liberals/neoclassical liberals (libertarians) and welfare/reform liberals? (c) Why is the issue of equality of opportunity so troubling for liberals today? (d) How can affirmative action be understood in light of these differences?
7. Describe the classical liberal notion of (a) freedom (in terms of agent, obstacle, and goal), (b) human nature, and (c) democracy. (d) Describe classical liberal ideology (explanation, evaluation, orientation, program).
8. (a) Describe the four major forms of conservatism in the United States today. (b) Which of them do you find most and least satisfactory, and why? Refer to specific policies and positions to explain your views.
9. Describe the classical/traditional conservative (Burkean) conception of (a) freedom (agent, obstacle, goal), (b) human nature, and (c) democracy. (d) Describe Burkean conservative ideology (explanation, evaluation, orientation, program).
10. Describe Marx's materialist conception of history, the relationship between the material base and ideological superstructure, and the sequence of events that Marx argued would bring about communism.
11. Describe Marx's notion of (a) freedom (agent; obstacle; goal), (b) democracy, and (c) human nature. (d) Describe Marxism as an ideology (explanation; evaluation; orientation; and program).

The final exam included questions pertaining to Socialism and Communism After Marx, Fascism, Liberation, Green, and Radical Islam. Students were required to study the following key concepts/themes and possible essay questions.

Socialism/Communism (SCAM) = Engels; revisionists, Bernstein; Lenin; vanguard party; Stalin; Mao; Anarcho-communism; Fabian socialism; American socialism; socialism as ideology; socialism and democracy

Fascism = reactionary ideology; Enlightenment/ Counter-Enlightenment; nationalism; elitism; irrationalism; Italian fascism; German fascism; fascism as ideology; fascism and democracy

Liberation = common characteristics; Black liberation; Women's liberation; Gay liberation; Native people's liberation; Liberation theology; Animal liberation; liberation as ideology; liberation and democracy

Green = green politics; counter-ideology; green critique of other

ideologies; anthropocentrism; ecological ethic; (ecocentrism/biocentrism); ecology; "light greens/dark greens"; arrogance of humanism; ecology as ideology; ecology, freedom, and democracy

Islam and Radical Islam = origins and history of Islam; differences between moderate/mainstream and Radical/fundamentalist Islam; Radical Islam (conceptions of human nature, freedom); Radical Islam as ideology; Radical Islam and democracy

Possible essay questions included:

1. How did Lenin, Stalin, and Mao "contribute" to and/or differ from Marx's theorizing? What is Marxism-Leninism? What is Stalinism? What is Maoism?
2. What are the main features of Enlightenment thought? What are the main features of the Counter-Enlightenment? What is the connection between the Counter-Enlightenment and the several varieties or variants of twentieth-century fascism?
3. All of the liberation ideologies claim to be promoting, or at least to be consistent with, democracy. Why are liberation ideologies sometimes associated with "the politics of identity" or "the politics of difference"? Is the emergence of this kind of politics something to be welcomed or feared? In what ways is the politics of identity/difference consistent with and/or contradictory to liberal democracy?
4. Greens often see themselves as part of a counter-ideology that must try to correct the mistaken beliefs and assumptions of other ideologies. Are they right to think of themselves in this way? That is, are the Greens right to blame current environmental problems on liberalism, socialism, and other ideologies? Why or why not?
5. Describe Radical Islam as an ideology. What is its view of human nature, freedom? Describe how it functions as an ideology (in terms of explanation, evaluation, orientation, and program).

Summary:

Despite a range of scores from D to A+ on the first writing assignment, the overall average was a B+. Most students demonstrated the capacity to analyze and evaluate original writings.

Likewise on the midterm, all but one student passed the exam, and the average score was a B.

On the second writing assignment, only one student earned a non-passing grade because their assignment was late. The overall average for the class was a B+.

The final exam produced an outcome similar to the midterm. Two students failed the exam, but the overall average was considerably higher than the midterm, an A-.

Enhancement (Part I):

Given the significant variation across the assessment measures, I learned that it would be worthwhile to spend additional time emphasizing the fact that each major ideological belief system has a very different view of human nature and the good society.

Thus, I will probably make an effort to incorporate this dimension into the writing assignments and exams.

Enhancement (Part II):

There shouldn't be additional resource allocations necessary for the above changes, however, it might be worthwhile to exam more fully the SLOs for the course as a department to see if they meet our expectations for Poli 5.

Outcome 2: Statement

Students will demonstrate the capacity to critically analyze and apply political theory to contemporary issues.

Outcome 2: Assessment Planning Modified: [06/19/2011]

Assessment Strategy Used:

Quarter: Winter 2011

Assessors: Robert Stockwell

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Sections being assessed: 01

Outcome 2: Reflect & Enhance Modified: [06/19/2011]

Number of people involved in Reflection and Enhancement: 1

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Enhancement (Part II):

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[Number of Outcomes for POLI 5: 2]