

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: **Socialist Political Thought**

Course Number and Section

POLISCI

4454F 550

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL Brightspace is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

This seminar course examines Karl Marx's – and Marxism's – decisive contribution to political theory generally, and the tradition of socialist political thought and the critique of capitalism, in particular. We will look at Marx's social theory, analysis of socialist struggle, and socialist political visions. While the course is anchored in a textual analysis and discussion of key writings by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, we will extend our reading in two major directions. First, we will look closely at how Marxists at the turn of the 20th century theorized a revolutionary transition to socialism. Second, we will look at how radical actors and thinkers mobilized Marx's and Marxist analyses to make sense of and work against sexism, racism, and colonialism in the twentieth century. Along the way, students will acquire a more complex and precise understanding of the claims that socialists and communists make in historical context, widening their understanding of key concepts in political theory. Naturally, our engagement with this tradition is selective and partial: we will only minimally engage with the much broader socialist tradition that preceded Marx, and we will only minimally read about "actually existing socialism" in the USSR, Cuba, China, and elsewhere. Students will, however, have the chance to explore a topic of their choice in their final paper.

Learning Outcomes: one outcome per entry

- Pinpoint, reconstruct, and analyze core claims of the socialist political tradition
- Understand the major arguments and consequences of Marx's writings in the field of political theory
- Engage with difficult, historically distant texts in a careful manner
- Facilitate and engage in conversations about contentious political issues
- Critically examine your own convictions, actions, and principles, and the political institutions under which you live

Textbooks and Course Materials:

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Simon, Hackett University Press.

Methods of Evaluation: one assignment per entry

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Textual Analysis Paper 1	10/23/2026	20
Textual Analysis Paper 2	11/19/2026	20
Seminar Presentation		15
Final Paper		30
Seminar Participation		15

Thursday, August 13, 2026

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For Textbooks and Course Materials (below), you are required to include the cost of each textbook or other learning material.

Note whether there are any restrictions that would prevent a student from using a second-hand copy. Here is some suggested text:

- Required textbook: [author, title, edition, publisher, date]. Cost: [insert amount].
 - Or include the weblink of the textbook’s publisher site that includes the cost information.
- Students need to purchase this edition. Second-hand or older editions will not be sufficient.
- OR Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.
- This course has an optional field trip that costs [insert amount].
- This course has a required field component that costs [insert amount].

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.