

University of Wyoming

POLS 2460 Intro to Political Philosophy, or POLS 4810, Topics in Political Philosophy

3 credit courses in Scotland

Summer 2025

Instructor:

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Office hours: Brent Pickett, by appointment; since I serve as the dean for UW's sole branch campus, in Casper, my schedule is highly variable.

Course prerequisites and enrollment restrictions: Successful completion of requirements for UW Study Abroad, including application (with two letters of reference), interview, and completion of health certification.

Course description:

Using Scotland as an historically constructed "imagined community," this course will examine how the dissemination of information and its objectivity (or lack thereof) functioned in the work of Scottish Enlightenment figures, especially in the work of David Hume and Adam Smith. We will cover, for instance, David Hume's skepticism of representative government, which was largely driven by his doubts that the citizens would have access to, or would even bother to access, accurate information about politics and policy. The complexity of social relations and foreign policy, the depth of factional allegiances, combined with the difficulty of determining what is true versus false all feature in his critique of the possibility of responsible representative government. Adam Smith, on the other hand, evinced more optimism about the role of accurate information. His defense of capitalism, for instance, shows how prices act to distribute information about scarcity, the ease or difficulty of transportation, and innovation. His moral philosophy posits an ideal 'impartial spectator' who would draw on accurate information above the perspective of those party to a moral conflict as the best guide to action.

The questions raised by Hume and Smith, about how broadly information circulates in society, the class and educational dimensions of access to it, the reliability of the information, and whether factional allegiances (especially political and religious) will prevent persons from accepting the information they are given, continue to be of central import today. We will utilize sites in Scotland to pursue these questions in their historical context. The stories we tell one another, in novels, religious tracts, folklore, and other narrative forms, comprise some of the most important forms of 'information.' That is, not all forms of 'information' are intended to be factual; the stories that help bind communities and nations together, as 'imagined communities,'

are important, but also selective, exaggerated, or even fictitious. Therefore it makes sense for us to begin our exploration at Sir Walter Scott's historic home, Abbotsford. Scott, a prolific author and notable judge, helped invent the historical novel in the English tradition. From there we will go to Edinburgh for several days. We will visit the Scottish National Parliament to see how ideals of governmental transparency and inclusion receive a physical embodiment in the architecture. We will also spend a half day at the National Museum of Scotland, walk the Royal Mile, see Adam Smith's grave and Edinburgh Castle. At the National Mining Museum we will consider how professions enable (or hinder) participation in civic life, although with the advantages and disadvantages of industrial scale in forming civic associations. At the site of the battle of Culloden, outside of Inverness, we will learn about the Jacobite Rebellion and reflect on factional disputes and how they can undermine constructive self-government (Hume's perspective) or potentially open a way to government marked by compromise and moderation (James Madison's view, in part drawing on Hume in an interesting way). In Glasgow, we will go to two great museums, The Hunterian and Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. At the former, the role of the production and dissemination of scientific information will be our focus; at the latter, art works that speak to Scottish national identity, Scotland as an imagined community, and history will draw our attention.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able:

To describe and critique the intellectual, social, and political motives behind Enlightenment thought, in particular that of the Scottish Enlightenment.

To place the political and economic thought of the Scottish Enlightenment within broader trends of modern European and North American thought.

To describe the core ideas of natural rights theory, how those relate to modern understandings of political obligation, and Hume's critique of that approach.

To demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures and historical perspectives.

Students will learn about the conceptual frameworks of political science, and philosophy, and marketing through their active participation in the exploration of intellectual topics, fostering their own development of perspectives that break down disciplinary categories.

Students will gain experience in the analysis of complex social formations in a transdisciplinary fashion, utilizing history, philosophy, political science, and the analysis of marketing and other intellectual traditions, but also making those traditions intersect in unanticipated ways. (It is the student's *own making* of those intersections which provides much of the experiential learning in this course.)

Required Texts:

Crowded with Genius, James Buchan, Harper Collins, 2009.

John Locke, *Second Treatise*.

“My Own Life,” “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” “Of the Original Contract,” “Of Passive Obedience,” and “Of the Protestant Succession,” from David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, Liberty Fund, 1985. The latter three essays, written in approximately 1747, were largely prompted by the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. We will visit the final battle site of that Rebellion and discuss its politics (and the dueling political theories behind it) extensively.

Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (excerpts will be provided in the course shell).

Course expectations: Your instructors expect that you will show up to class having read and viewed the assigned materials for that day, and wanting to engage with others about those texts and images. Especially in a transdisciplinary course such as this, the connections that we make *together* as a class will be the heart of the learning experience. During the study abroad portion of the class, your instructors expect you to abide by the expectations laid out early in the course.

Course requirements:

There will be a short quiz over the syllabus. We will get together regularly while in Scotland to discuss our readings. While in country, you are to post about the trip on our WyoCourse platform at least twice a week. Each student will lead the class in a discussion of an outside reading. Students will take turns being the ‘Daily Captain’ and will also be assigned a day they will be the “Daily Expert” when we visit a specific site. There will also be a final paper. I will hand out a description of the paper expectations the first week of the course.

Syllabus quiz: 10 points.

Class discussions: 150 points

WyoCourse postings: 60 points

Daily captain and daily expert roles: 30 points

Presentation on additional reading: 50 points

Final paper: 100 points

Total: 400 points.

Grading scale and grading policies:

Grades will be awarded on the traditional 90/80/70, etc. scale. 20 points will be deducted from your final paper grade for each 24 hour period it is late.

Attendance and absence policies: given that this is a study abroad course, your attendance for all excursions, museum trips, etc., is expected. Absence due to medical reasons will be allowed,

but daily, engaged participation is not encouraged, it is expected for every student. Absences will significantly affect one's grade.

Classroom behavior policy: In particular since this is a study abroad course, it is important that you act responsibly and treat your classmates and instructors with respect. Act appropriately, arrive on time at meeting points, pay attention, and please complete your work (including the reading assignments) in a timely manner. Spirited debate and disagreement are to be expected, and welcomed, in any classroom and all views will be heard fully, but at all times we will behave civilly and with respect towards one another. Personal attacks, offensive language, name-calling, and dismissive gestures are not warranted in a learning atmosphere.

Classroom Statement on Diversity: The University of Wyoming values an educational environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The diversity that students and faculty bring to class, including age, country of origin, culture, disability, economic class, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, linguistic, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, worldview, and other social and cultural diversity is valued, respected, and considered a resource for learning.

Disability support: The University of Wyoming is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you have a disability, including but not limited to physical, learning, sensory or psychological disabilities, and would like to request accommodations in this course due to your disability, please register with and provide documentation of your disability as soon as possible to Disability Support Services (DSS), Room 128 Knight Hall. You may also contact DSS at (307) 766-3073 or udss@uwyo.edu. It is in the student's best interest to request accommodations within the first week of classes, understanding that accommodations are not retroactive. Visit the DSS website for more information at: www.uwyo.edu/udss

Academic dishonesty policy: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. Cases of academic dishonesty will be treated in accordance with UW Regulation 2-114. The penalties for academic dishonesty can include, at my discretion, an "F" on an exam, an "F" on the class component exercise, and/or an "F" in the entire course. Academic dishonesty means anything that represents someone else's ideas as your own without attribution. It is intellectual theft – stealing - and includes (but is not limited to) unapproved assistance on examinations, plagiarism (use of any amount of another person's writings, blog posts, publications, and other materials without attributing that material to that person with citations), or fabrication of referenced information. Facilitation of another person's academic dishonesty is also considered academic dishonesty and will be treated identically.

Duty to report: UW faculty are committed to supporting students and upholding the University's non-discrimination policy. Under Title IX, discrimination based upon sex and gender is prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex- or gender-based discrimination, we encourage you to report it. While you may talk to a faculty member, understand that as a "Responsible Employee" of the University, the faculty member MUST report information you share about the incident to the university's Title IX Coordinator (you may choose whether you or anyone involved is identified by name). If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you privacy or confidentiality, there are people who can meet with you. Faculty

can help direct you or you may find info about UW policy and resources at <http://www.uwyo.edu/reportit>

You do not have to go through the experience alone. Assistance and resources are available, and you are not required to make a formal complaint or participate in an investigation to access them.

Substantive changes to syllabus: All deadlines, requirements, and course structure is subject to change if deemed necessary by the instructor. Students will be notified verbally in class, on our WyoCourses page announcement, and via email of these changes.

Student resources:

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES: udss@uwyo.edu, 766-3073, 128 Knight Hall, www.uwyo.edu/udss

COUNSELING CENTER: uccstaff@uwyo.edu, 766-2187, 766-8989 (After hours), 341 Knight Hall, www.uwyo.edu/ucc

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS: 766-4286, 312 Old Main, www.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE: dos@uwyo.edu, 766-3296, 128 Knight Hall, www.uwyo.edu/dos

UW POLICE DEPARTMENT: uwpd@uwyo.edu, 766-5179, 1426 E Flint St, www.uwyo.edu/uwpd

STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT WEBSITE: www.uwyo.edu/dos/conduct

Course calendar:

Week of June 16th, 2025 (classes to be held via Zoom)

Monday: Orientation to study abroad and UW in Scotland. Guest speakers: UW Study Abroad advisor, Sara Robinson, and Dr. Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Director of UW in Scotland.

Tuesday: What was the Enlightenment?

The Scottish Enlightenment in its historical and geographic context.

Ideas as socially embedded: religion, skepticism, and power in Scotland.

Reading: "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," by David Hume. Available open source at: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/politicaltheoryreadinggroup/files/2013/02/OF-THE-RISE-AND-PROGRESS-OF-THE-ARTS-AND-SCIENCES.pdf>

Wednesday: Wrapping up with the Enlightenment.

Read Locke's *Second Treatise*, paragraphs 1-51.

Thursday: social contract theory. Read Locke, all of chapter VII and paragraphs 95-101 of chapter VIII.

Summer Schedule in Scotland.

Please note that prior to arriving in Scotland, the following readings are assigned:

David Hume, "My Own Life" available open source at <https://www.econlib.org/book-chapters/chapter-my-own-life-by-david-hume/>

Buchan, *Crowded with Genius*, Prologue and chapters 1-3.

Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapter XI.

June 24th, Arrival in Scotland

Travel to Abbotsford. A group of us will need to make an expedition to purchase food, since we will be cooking for ourselves while at Sir Walter Scott's estate.

June 25th, Day 2, Abbotsford

After we enjoy a communal breakfast, we will tour the estate grounds. Then, we will tour the house where Sir Walter Scott lived, including the elegant Chinese Drawing Room with hand painted wallpaper, the armory, exhibition room, and Scott's study, and his library (my favorite room). In the later afternoon we will gather (perhaps in a garden if the weather is good) to discuss some of the readings assigned during our travel time.

June 26th, Day 3, Abbotsford

For today, please read Locke, chapters IX, X, and XI of the *Second Treatise*, and David Hume's critique of Locke, "Of the Original Contract." Available open source at [OF THE ORIGINAL CONTRACT \(colorado.edu\)](#)

Communal (and group-prepared) breakfast, then a free morning. In the afternoon we will convene to discuss course readings.

June 27th, Day 4, Abbotsford to Edinburgh (read Buchan, chapters 4 and 5. I also recommend chapter 7; it has a good history of Edinburgh's development.)

Communal (and group-prepared) breakfast, then an excursion to a textile mill and to the National Mining Museum.

The tour operator we are working with will transport us to Edinburgh and to your hostel (Kick Ass Greyfriars).

June 28th, Day 5, Edinburgh (prior to this day, read Buchan, ch.8)

Edinburgh Castle, the Royal Mile, the David Hume statue, Adam Smith's grave, the original Scottish Parliament building, the new Scottish Parliament.

June 29th, Day 6, Edinburgh (Note: prior to this day, you should read Buchan, ch.10.)

The Scottish National Museum and the National Portrait Gallery. We will discuss James Hutton, an important figure in the Scottish Enlightenment and who contributes to the overall story about how we have come to understand ourselves and our place in the universe.

June 30th, Day 7, Edinburgh to Inverness

Please read David Hume's "Of Passive Obedience" and "Of the Protestant Succession". They are available open source.

After a free morning in Edinburgh, a private coach will take us to our lodging in Inverness (Black Isle Hostel).

July 1, Day 8, Inverness

A private coach will take us to the historic village of Drumnadrochit. We will visit the Loch Ness Centre and discuss the legends and mythology about the lake and its purported inhabitants. We will take a cruise on the loch and see the ruins of Urquhart Castle.

July 2nd, Day 9, Inverness

A free day to explore the Scottish Highlands.

July 3rd, Day 10, Inverness

We will go to the Highlanders' Museum. We will go to the visitor center at the Culloden Battlefield site and then continue to the Clava Cairns.

July 4th, Day 11, Inverness

In the morning the group will convene to discuss our readings and connect those to what we are seeing. In the afternoon, we will go to the Tomatin distillery for a tour. (Tasting not included.)

July 5th, Day 12, Inverness to Glasgow

In the morning we will travel to Glasgow on a private coach. After checking in to the Easy Hotel, the faculty will lead a guided tour, including the famous Necropolis.

July 6th, Day 13, Glasgow

A free day to explore Glasgow.

July 7th, Day 14, Glasgow

A great day for museums: morning at the Hunterian, the afternoon will be at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. Our farewell dinner is this evening.

July 8th, Day 15, Departure

The course ends.