

Northwestern University

Political Science 230: Introduction to Law in the Political Arena Fall 2015

Expectations, Requirements, and Guidelines for Discussion Section

POLI_SCI 230-0-70/71, Burdic Room, Scott Hall 107, Friday 12-12:50pm

POLI_SCI 230-0-72, Burdic Room, Scott Hall 107, Friday 1-150pm

Instructor: Professor Alisa Kaplan

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Office Room: 219, Scott Hall (601 University Place, Political Science Department, second floor)

Office Hours: Friday, 2:30-4pm, and by appointment.

Expectations

Discussion section is a joint undertaking between me as your TA and you as students. Unlike the professor's job in class, my role in discussion section is to lead discussion. In so doing I learn as much as you do. The section succeeds or fails depending on whether or not we all do our bit.

I will do my best to stay on top of the readings so as to meaningfully lead discussion. But I expect you too to keep up with the material and be able to make constructive contributions in section. This means we all have to keep up with the week's assigned readings. Taking it a notch higher by reading beyond what's assigned on the course syllabus can only make discussion more informed and better rewarding.

In leading discussion section I will be aiming at about three interrelated goals:

- To highlight key learning points from the professor's lectures for the week and ask for your thoughts on the same;
- Flag off the key questions and major findings from the week's assigned readings, and identify the main concepts and ideas that need to be properly grasped;
- Work towards synthesizing the professor's lectures with the week's readings and thresh out the key learning points for the week. This would, I believe, help you better prepare for the midterm and the final.

Requirements

a. Attendance and participation

There is 15% credit for discussion section attendance and participation. This means that consistent attendance and active participation in discussion section is a requirement for the course. There is absolutely no reason why you shouldn't aim at taking full credit from section participation! It's there for grabs. All you have to do is attend consistently and participate constructively. It also means keeping up with the readings and staying on top.

As part of preparing for section, I'll ask each student to come up with two questions on the week's topic and readings that they would like discussed in the section.

b. Response papers

You will write three response papers on any three weeks of your choice in the course of the quarter. I'll provide a signup sheet for the same during the first meeting of section. The response papers will be due **24 hours before the section meets**, meaning before noon on Thursday of the respective week that one signed up. You can email me the paper but it will be better to give me a hard copy at the end of class on Thursday at 12:15.

Each response paper will be a maximum of **two (2) pages, double-spaced**. Pay more attention on making an incisive critique of the reading material you're responding to than stopping at summarizing. Each response paper will take 5% totaling to 15% for the three papers.

c. Midterm

This will be in class on **Thursday October 22 at 11am**. Professor Kaplan will communicate the structure of the exam the week before.

d. Final

The final will also be in the same classroom on **Tuesday December 8 from 12 to 2pm**. It's likely to be cumulative, covering all the material in the course. But Professor Kaplan will clarify on this.

Section discussion rules

Everyone must have a chance to comment or raise a question during discussion section. I will make sure we all have an opportunity to speak. Do not feel constrained to stop me and make a contribution. Discussion section is not lecture time; it is discussion time where everyone gets a chance to talk. We all have different opinions and interpretations of what we have read. Thus, in leading the discussion, I will make sure that one viewpoint is not privileged over others.

Also, one or two people will not dominate the section and crowd out others who too wish to make a contribution. The wider the view-points expressed, the better the learning. I strongly encourage constructive disagreement but with utmost respect for one another. We must as much as we can restrain from unkind or rude statements. Let's be critical with civility! This is not a call to being politically correct...

In the event that you wish to have a follow up conversation with me after section, send me an email so we can set up an appointment. You'll also have plenty of time to chat with during office hours. It's my primary duty to help you better understand the key issues, concepts, arguments and counter-arguments in the course. And in the end, I would like to see everyone get a good grade after putting in great effort!

I look forward to a fruitful and intellectually rewarding quarter, working with you as your TA.