

Spirit of the Laws
(Fall 2024 [B Quad])

This is a draft syllabus and is subject to change

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Course Meetings: MWF 2:15pm-3:25pm (MSC 124)
Student Hours: MWF 3:30pm-4:30pm, TuTh 9:15am-10:45am

Department Mission Statement:

The mission of the Department of Politics and International Relations is to equip students with knowledge about politics and government, with methods for analyzing political actors and institutions, and with the ability to apply biblical and theological perspectives to public life.

i. Course Overview and Objectives

The single greatest influence on the American founding apart from the Bible. A heretical, anti-Christian polemic. One of the most nuanced defenses of social inequality. A damning critique of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. An unapologetic defense of racist stereotypes of Asia and the Middle East. One of the most well-known celebrations of free trade as a means of preventing war between nations. A founding text of the fields of anthropology, comparative law, and sociology. Since its publication in 1748, *Spirit of the Laws* has been interpreted in all the above ways and more. In this course, we will read *Spirit of the Laws* with attention to these (and other) interpretations. Our aim is to collectively determine—from a distinctly Christian perspective—the degree to which we might find the arguments encountered in Montesquieu’s text persuasive (or not) as they bear on both Christian faith/practice and on the world. Through dialogue and writing, students will develop their ability to compare and critically (though charitably) assess the disparate foundations and influences of Montesquieu’s work while also establishing their own scholarly, political, and legal voices. In so doing, students will work out a nuanced view of comparative, global, and European political and legal thought, both within and outside of the global church.

In short, this course aims to improve students’ ability to:

- **Assess** the claims of Montesquieu’s most famous work in a charitable, yet critical, manner
- **Develop** nuanced normative, legal, and political arguments concerning Montesquieu’s theories and observations through dialogue and writing

ii. Required Text

No prior background in French/European history or knowledge of Montesquieu is required. The reading below will be available for purchase in the bookstore. I will provide all other readings. Readings will be in English. If you have concerns obtaining the text below, please contact me.

- Montesquieu. *Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1989.

iii. Assignments, Grading, and Policies

Participation	25 %
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Regular class attendance, active discussion posting, and active in-class participation facilitate the successful comparison and assessment of the concepts, observations, and historical material encountered in this course. Thus, attendance, discussion posts, and participation in class are mandatory. Absences due to personal emergencies, illness, or other legitimate causes will be excused with advanced notice and proper documentation, where applicable. Good participation reflects quantity *and* quality of in- and out-of-class comments. Students are expected to come to class with texts readily available, having done the reading and having prepared for respectful and substantive discussion. Laptops are allowed only for course-related activities; other observed activities will result in a grade reduction. I am available for any student wishing to discuss methods for engaging more effectively in class discussion. Discussion posts will require students to (1) select a quote that best exemplifies a key theme of the day’s reading (50-75 words) for the upcoming class period and (2) interpret the quote and assess its merit for politics and Christian faith now

(less than 150 words). Discussion posts will be due 8am CST the day of the relevant class session via Canvas and will form part of the basis for in-class discussion. After each of the five major parts, we will have a [disputation](#) class period. Disputations will focus on a “resolved” statement (such as, *Resolved: Capital Punishment is Justified in a Democratic Society*). The disputation begins with an introduction from the professor. Two students (the disputants) then present arguments (8-10 minutes each) in the spirit of the resolved statement, one taking the affirmative position, the other the negative. (Roles will be assigned in advance.) After the students are finished speaking, the professor will allow attendees to ask clarifying questions (10 minutes maximum) and, following that, a break (~10 minutes). During the break, or *peripatos*, students are asked to pair up with another student they do not know, or with whom they might disagree, and take a walk together around the quad to discuss the disputation theme. After the break time has elapsed, we will return for the discussion, which will take up the majority of the time. At the end of the disputation, each student will vote in the “affirmative” or the “negative” regarding the resolved statement and ask a reflective question.

Class Attendance/Participation: 10%

Canvas Discussion Posts: 10%

Disputation: 5%

Analysis Essays

75%

Analysis essays serve as a written means for students to demonstrate their ability to practically reflect on course material and develop their writing skills. For the essay assignments, students may select one of two options: (1) two shorter essays or (2) a longer research essay. If students choose the first option, for each essay they must choose a theme (to be approved by the professor) to analyze, using textual evidence in service of a sustained argument. The first essay must focus on a theme from the first three parts of *Spirit of the Laws*. The second essay must focus on a theme from the latter three parts of *Spirit of the Laws*. Essay 1 is 1000-1200 words and is due week 4; essay 2 is 1300-1500 words and is due week 8. If students choose the second option, they must choose a theme (to be approved by the professor) to analyze, using textual evidence in service of a sustained, research-based argument. This means students will need to go beyond assigned class reading textual evidence and incorporate scholarly (i.e. peer-reviewed) secondary sources into their research essay. A 1000-word prospectus composed of a research question, 5 annotations, and a literature review will be due week 4 and the final research essay (1800-2000 words) will be due week 8. With both options, students are expected to consult with the professor concerning the viability of their essay arguments. All essays should be doubled-spaced, 12pt font, and normal margins. Essays must be on time. Essays must be original work from the student; plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstance and will result in failure on the assignment and possibly failure in the course or further College sanctions. If students are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism, they should consult the Student Handbook and Community Covenant. Essay 1 is due week 4; essay 2 is due week 8.

Option 1:

Essay 1 (1000-1200 words): 30%

Essay 2 (1300-1500 words): 45%

Option 2:

Essay Prospectus (1000 words): 25%

Research Essay (1800-2000 words): 50%

Grading Range

_____	A: 100-94	A-: 93-90
B+: 89-87	B: 86-84	B-: 83-80
C+: 79-77	C: 76-74	C-: 73-70
D+: 69-67	D: 66-64	F: 63-0

iv. General Policies

Academic Integrity

The Wheaton College Community Covenant, which all members of our academic community affirm, states that, “According to the Scriptures, followers of Jesus Christ will...be people of integrity whose word can be

fully trusted (Psalm 15:4; Matt. 5:33-37).” It is expected that Wheaton College students, faculty and staff understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and take full personal responsibility and accountability for their work. Wheaton College considers violations of academic integrity a serious offense against the basic meaning of an academic community and against the standards of excellence, integrity, and behavior expected of members of our academic community. Violations of academic integrity break the trust that exists among members of the learning community at Wheaton and degrade the College’s educational and research mission. Incidents of academic dishonesty in this course will be addressed according to Wheaton’s Policy on Integrity of Scholarship: <https://catalog.wheaton.edu/undergraduate/academicpolicies-information/academic-information/>.

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a faculty member. I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on Wheaton College’s campus with the College. Confidential resources available to students include Confidential Advisors, the Counseling Center, Student Health Services, and the Chaplain’s Office. More information on these resources and College Policies is available at www.wheaton.edu/sexualassaultresponse.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Intellectual honesty is vital to our academic community and for my fair evaluation of your work. All work submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the Student Handbook and Community Covenant. You may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or make use of generative AI tools or software. Any failure to uphold this will result in a zero on the assignment.

Inclusive Language

As per the faculty rules, I expect students to use gender inclusive language for human beings.

Learning and Accessibility Services

Wheaton College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with documented learning differences, physical or mental health conditions that qualify for accommodations under the ADA. Any student needing academic adjustments is requested to contact the Learning and Accessibility Services Office as early in the semester as possible. To contact LAS, please email las@wheaton.edu, call 630.752.5615, or visit the Student Services Building (Suite 209). If you already have an accommodation letter, I am available to discuss how to implement the accommodation. The accommodations process is dynamic, interactive, and completely free and confidential. Do not hesitate to reach out or ask any questions. (For more information see <http://wheaton.edu/las>).

Writing Center

Writing Center: The Writing Center is a free resource that equips undergraduate and graduate students across the disciplines to develop effective writing skills and processes. This academic year, the Writing Center is offering [online appointments only](#). Learn more about online consultations for [undergraduates](#) and [graduate students](#), and [make an appointment](#).

v. Tips for Success

In my experience, students who follow these tips tend to do well. I encourage you to heed them.

- *Finish the reading at least 24 hours before it is due.* For example, finish Wednesday’s class reading by Tuesday morning. This will require time management, but it allows more time for reflection.
- *Take notes as you read, in the text.* This will allow you to track your reactions to the readings and think (ahead of class) about intriguing or puzzling passages.
- *Come to office hours.* I do not bite. I am invested in you succeeding in this course.
- *Talk with your peers about the readings outside of class.* It helps you process and vocalize your views on the text(s) in preparation for class discussion.

- Map out the “A-L-E” (Argument-Logic-Evidence) of the text before, during, and after class. Your reproduction of the “A-L-E” of class texts helps enrich both our class discussion and your written assignments.
- [For any writing assignment] Outline your argument—section by section, paragraph by paragraph. If you cannot justify why a section or paragraph should be included in the writing assignment, do not include it.

vi. Reading Schedule

Assignments listed under each day are ***due for that day***.

[Pages of Reading]

I. Part 1 – General Principles

Week One

M (10/21): **NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)**

W (10/23): **NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)**

F (10/25): Introduction

Complete Pre-Assessment Surveys

Week Two

M (10/28): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Preface, Books 1-3

[~31]

W (10/30): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 4 (chs. 1-3, 5); Book 5 (chs. 1-3, 8-9, 14, 19); Book 6

[~44]

F (11/1): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 7-8

[~33]

ESSAY 1 & PROSPECTUS PROMPTS OUT

Week Three

M (11/4): ***Disputation 1: Regime Typologies***

[~7]

II. Part 2 – Force and Political Liberty

W (11/6): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 9-10

[~23]

F (11/8): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 11

[~33]

Week Four

M (11/11): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 12-13

[~41]

W (11/13): ***Disputation 2: Liberalism***

[~21]

III. Part 3 – Climate

F (11/15): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 14-15

[~33]

ESSAY 1 or PROSPECTUS DUE

Week Five

M (11/18): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 16-18

[~46]

W (11/20): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 19

[~29]

F (11/22): ***Disputation 3: Orientalism***

[~23]

IV. Part 4 – Commerce

Week SixM (11/25): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 20

[~17]

W (11/27): **NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)**F (11/29): **NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)**Week SevenM (12/2): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 21

[~44]

ESSAY 2 & RESEARCH ESSAY PROMPTS OUTW (12/4): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 22, Book 23 chs. 1-16, 22-29

[~46]

F (12/6): *Disputation 4: Doux Commerce*

[~30]

V. Part 5 – ReligionWeek EightM (12/9): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Books 24-25

[~35]

W (12/11): *Spirit of the Laws* (1748); Book 26

[~27]

F (12/13): *Disputation 5: Religion*

[~26]

ESSAY 2 or RESEARCH ESSAY DUE