I. Scope and Purpose

The social contract is one of the most important concepts in modern western political thought. Whether we are thinking about the nature and limits of sovereignty, rights, the duties of government, the duties of citizens, or the balance between the individual and the community, we often invoke the idea of a contract to shape and clarify our beliefs. But why is it that contract plays such an important role in our thinking? After all, relationships based on contract (or explicit agreement) are but one form of human relationships; none of us choose where we are born, when we are born, or to whom, and our friendships and sexual relationships are generally not rooted in contract. And if contract does play a central role in our political thinking, what are its strengths and limitations? Does an emphasis on contract prevent us from seeing certain forms of injustice or oppression? Can the language of contract be separated from the historical circumstances in which it emerged – namely, patriarchy and the era of European colonialism, imperialism, and the institution of slavery?

These questions and others will be the focus of this course, the majority of which will deal with the classic social contract theorists, while the remainder will deal with prominent critics of contract theory. Over the course of the term, students will encounter three of the most important contract theorists in the western political tradition (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau), and will also encounter early (Marx) and contemporary (Pateman and Mills) critics of the idea of the social contract. In doing so, we will engage in discussions of topics such as sovereignty, rights, authority, consent, the relationship between the public and private spheres, gender, race, and class.

II. Evaluation

A. Class Participation and In-Class Writing Assignments (30%)

This will be a participation-intensive course, featuring structured group work (The Original Position exercise, described in the following paragraph) and in-class discussion. For the course to be successful, students need to attend class regularly and come prepared to engage in thoughtful discussion of course materials. This means coming to class with the reading and having done the reading in advance. Missing one class is roughly equivalent to missing one week
of class in a semester long course, and attendance is expected. Outstanding participation will entail frequent and thoughtful contributions to class discussions; it will also entail attentive and respectful interactions with the instructor and fellow students.

The Original Position, noted above, is a phrase borrowed from John Rawls’ classic 1971 book, *Justice as Fairness*. Over the course of the semester, students will work in groups to design their own social contracts as if they were setting up their own governments. These agreements will be subject to revision over the course of the term as we complete each text and begin a new one. Each student will be given a brief fictional biography with certain facts that they are to take into consideration when deliberating over the agreement. The initial agreement must be unanimous, though groups could vote unanimously to adopt other decision procedures in revisions: e.g. consensus, unanimity, majority, fixed vetoes. Each group should have a designated secretary whose job it will be to write up the initial agreement, and then to note any subsequent revisions. At the end of the term, each student will write a short paper in class explaining how well he or she fared in helping to create the agreement. The criteria by which you measure success will be your own, but you should make them clear in the paper.

In addition to participation and the Original Position, there will be occasional short in-class writing assignments (not quizzes, per se) that will factor in to this portion of the grade.

**B. Short Analytical Papers (50%)**

All students in this class will write 3 short (4-6 pages, 1000-1500 word) papers. These papers are to be analyses of a news story through the lens of a course reading. The first will be due on or by Monday, July 8; the second will be due on or by Monday, July 15; the third will be due on or by Monday, July 22. You may write about a print (either traditional or “new” media) news story, television news story, or radio news story. You should not write about editorial pieces. Your papers must develop an interpretation of the problem the story deals with using concepts or arguments drawn directly from course material, and they should suggest a potential solution deploying concepts from a particular course reading. These guidelines will be addressed at length in class.

Papers are to be double spaced, in 12 point Times New Roman font, with black ink, and stapled. (Citation style should adhere to the format of the *Chicago Manual of Style*). On the first page of the paper, please write the number of words in the paper. Papers that do not meet these specifications – **including unstapled papers** - will not be accepted. Papers will not be accepted late, and emailed short analytical papers will not be graded.

**C. Long(er) Analytical Paper (20%)**

All students in this class will write 1 longer (5-7 pages, 1250-1750 words) paper outlining potential revisions to their group’s Original Position document in light of the discussion of Marx, Pateman, and Mills. These papers are to be written with the same formatting
guidelines as the short analytical papers, and are to be emailed to me in MS Word format no later than 9:00 am on Monday, July 29.

III. Class Expectations

You can expect me, as your instructor, to come to class prepared, to be available for assistance during office hours or by mutually convenient appointment, to answer email correspondence in a reasonable amount of time (provided your email uses proper punctuation, grammar, spelling, appellation, and is signed), to provide feedback on your performance, to hand back written work in a reasonable amount of time, and to provide clear instructions and guidelines.

I expect you, as students, to come to class prepared to engage in the material and on time, to be attentive and respectful in class, to check your university-registered email regularly, to read and understand the syllabus and other course guidelines, in addition to adhering to all university policies and policies stated in the syllabus. Students may not use laptops, cellular phones, or similar items in this class, with the exception of devices for displaying e-texts.

A NOTE ON READING: We will cover as much material in this short summer course as we would ordinarily cover in a semester-long course. However, I understand that it would be very difficult to do as much reading as we would do in a semester long course, so I have asked you to read selected portions of the course material. I will begin each session with a brief lecture situating the material, and then we will move on to discussing the assigned material itself.

IV. Grading

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A ≥ 93.5  AB = 87.5-93.4  B = 82.5-87.4  BC = 77.5-82.4
C = 69.5-77.4  D = 60-69.4  F ≤ 59.9

V. Materials

There are three required books for this course, listed below in the order that we will be reading them; the ISBNs can be found at my.wisc.edu.

David Wootton, Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzsche (Hackett)
Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract (Stanford)
Charles Mills, The Racial Contract (Cornell)

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will be dealt with severely. Should you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, please consult this resource (http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html) or email me. This syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may occur.
Schedule of Discussions and Readings

Monday, 7/1: No reading; course introduction, drafting of Original Position

Tuesday, 7/2: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 13, 14, 15 (Wootton)

Wednesday, 7/3: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 16, 17, 18(Wootton)

Thursday, 7/4: No class

Monday, 7/8: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 19, 21, 29, 30 (Wootton)

Tuesday, 7/9: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 (Wootton)

    Group activity: Revising the Original Position in Light of Hobbes

Wednesday, 7/10: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 7, 8, 9, 11 (Wootton)

Thursday, 7/11: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Chapters 14, 18, 19; Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book II, Chapters 1-7 (Wootton)

    Group activity: Revising the Original Position in Light of Locke

Monday, 7/15: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I, Chapters 1-7, cont’d; Book II, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 (Wootton)

Tuesday, 7/16: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Books I and II, cont’d; Book II, Chapter 7, and Book IV, Chapter 8 (Wootton)

Wednesday, 7/17: Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (Wootton)

    Group activity: Revising the Original Position in Light of Rousseau

Thursday, 7/18: Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Chapters 1, 2, 3

Monday, 7/22: Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, cont’d; Chapters 6, 8

Tuesday, 7/23: Mills, *The Racial Contract*, READ Chapter 1, SKIM Chapter 2

Wednesday, 7/24: Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Chapters 1 and 2, cont’d; Chapter 3; Course Conclusion

Thursday, 7/25: EXTRA DAY