

## **PROPOSAL FOR A NEW TEAM-TAUGHT COURSE**

Professors Eugene Holland (Comparative Studies) Joel Wainwright (Geography)  
Course title: “An introduction to critical political economy: Marx’s *Capital*, culture and geography”  
Intended student rank: undergraduate (open)  
Prerequisites: none  
Credits: 5

In recent years there has been a remarkable – and, frankly, surprising – florescence of books and thinkers asking fundamental political, economic and moral questions. Around the world people are asking: What, exactly, is capitalism? When did it come to be the dominant economic system, and why? Is deep inequality inevitable? Is capitalism sustainable? Consider, as just one sign of this moment, that Thomas Piketty’s book *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a 700-page economic treatise on capitalism and inequality, is the top-selling book at amazon.com. Consider too that the editorial pages of our newspapers are debating what Marx may have contributed to some of Piketty’s ideas. When an ostensibly Marxist book is more popular than the usual amazon fare (epic fantasy and self-help books), a nerve has clearly been struck.

In the proposed course, we take up some of these fundamental questions. In short, our aim is to help students understand capitalism as a social formation. We proceed from the conviction that one of the best ways to grasp capitalism as a historical social formation is to come to terms with the critique of political economy laid down by Karl Marx in his magnum opus, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. *Capital* is undoubtedly a ‘classic’, a fundamental contribution to both the social sciences and the humanities. Yet its massive contributions are matched by its mass: the book is a foreboding, dense tapestry of arguments and ideas, wrought through its own complex vocabulary. Very few readers have the courage to scale its summits alone. *Capital* is best approached in a group, preferably with knowledgeable guides.

### Course content and objectives

In the proposed course, we will read most of the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*, preceded by selections from three great political economists who were Marx’s key interlocutors (Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Samuel Bailey), and followed by selections from several books showing how aspects of Marx’s analysis of capitalism have been adapted in the very different fields of development geography and cultural studies. Our purpose is not to champion or even evaluate Marx’s work as a theory of economics, but rather to introduce our students to one of the richest, most profound works in the Western tradition and to explore its impact on our fields of study. Like Shakespeare or Freud, Marx is no stuffy thinker that one should read simply to satisfy college requirements. The problems under analysis in *Capital* remain significant today—indeed they are only too significant for many of our students. And Marx’s approach has proven incredibly useful in our fields, so long as it is analyzed *critically*, which means, in the first instance, being *understood* critically. Many of our students are well aware of this too. Our course proposal is inspired by the multiple groups of undergraduates who have sought help from us in their attempts to read *Capital*.

### Team teaching *Capital*: why and how?

*Capital* is an inherently interdisciplinary work. Marx’s own intellectual training was in History, Law and Philosophy, and these fields bear enormously on the text. But the book itself is a *critique of political economy* – the book’s subtitle – and while many of its core concepts were transformed by the modern discipline of Economics (a discipline that did not yet exist when Marx wrote *Capital* in the 1860s), any reading of *Capital* raises fundamental questions about politics, geography, morality and culture as well. Indeed there is arguably no sphere of modern social thought which has not been touched by Marx’s analysis of capitalist society. This is not to suggest that teaching *Capital* requires a host of faculty representing every social-science and

humanities discipline. Rather it is to say that teaching *Capital* requires very well-read teachers with a careful and critical approach to pedagogy. Team-teaching will help immeasurably in this respect.

### Why Holland & Wainwright?

We come not only from different departments and colleges, but entirely distinct intellectual paths and disciplines. Eugene Holland is a literary and cultural theorist; much of his scholarship examines how the perspective of Marx has been supplemented and adjusted to accommodate the insights of Freud and Nietzsche, and how the resulting understanding of cultural dynamics can be employed to illuminate modern European literary and intellectual histories. Joel Wainwright is a geographer who has studied the politics of development and environmental issues, principally in Mesoamerica; his first two books concern Belize and Oaxaca. Our research does not overlap. But we share an abiding interest in the history of political economy, meaning both political-economic relations of specific social formations as well as the histories of political and economic ideas in those societies. This is why we both came to *Capital*, a book we have studied and struggled with separately over the past several decades, and parts of which we have also both taught in our courses at Ohio State, usually with very positive effects. In one of Holland's literature courses, for instance, Marx's analysis of capitalism is compared to the allegorical representation of *Capital* in George Orwell's prescient dystopian novel, *1984*. And in Wainwright's course, 'The making of the modern world,' students read the *Communist Manifesto* alongside works by John Locke and Albert Einstein to grasp the significance of the emergence of capitalist social relations.

Although we do not always see eye-to-eye in our own understandings of Marx, we have been friends for several years which, while perhaps not essential, certainly makes team-teaching seem more tractable and fun; and we have enjoyed working together in various settings on campus. Holland has extensive experience team-teaching with faculty from different disciplinary backgrounds in the interdisciplinary Comparative Studies department, and this experience is reflected in our plans for team-teaching this course. We have collaborated on the course design, and will both attend all class sessions, alternately taking responsibility for lecturing and leading discussion on a given day or even within a given class session. We anticipate that there will be a few occasions when we divide the class into two 'break out' sections and lead discussion simultaneously. Evaluation of students' written work will be divided equally, and in such a way that the two of us read work by every student, and every student gets feedback from both of us, over the course of the semester.

### How will the course benefit students?

The chief benefit of reading Marx today is that it provides the reader with a depth of historical perspective on our social lives today. Our previous experiences teaching Marx at Ohio State has shown that there is enormous interest among our students for his work—and that they are drawn to it for the right reasons: they feel that an understanding of capitalism itself drawn from one of its greatest critics can provide an important complement to what they learn of politics (from Political Science) or markets (from Economics) or literature (from English or German). And although we have enjoyed introducing Marx to our students in these courses, our experience has in one respect been less than satisfying. Imagine trying to teach Shakespeare by

reading just a few sonnets, knowing that your students have never read *Hamlet*: serious teachers want to tackle the most important work, even – or especially – when it is a challenge. In Marx’s case, *Capital* is that work: it is long (900+ pages), and even skipping a few chapters, working through it will take the better part of a semester.

### How will the course advance the academic goals of Comparative Studies and Geography?

The Department of Comparative Studies is the prime locus at Ohio State of research and teaching in the field of Cultural Studies, a field informed since its inception by the works of Marx and Marxist cultural and literary scholars such as Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson. The principle intellectual goal of the department of Geography is to cultivate a critical understanding of the world. The subfield of human geography includes many courses that make reference to and read works by Marxist geographers like David Harvey. (Harvey spoke in our department last year: it was the largest event ever organized by the department with 200+ present.) Notwithstanding the centrality of *Marxist ideas*, however, there are no courses in either department that focus on reading *Marx’s writings*.<sup>1</sup> This course will make up for that deficiency.

### Assessment strategy

To measure student achievement of learning goals, we plan to employ both direct and indirect assessment measures. For a direct measure, we will include one embedded question in the final exam. For indirect measures we will use an anonymous ‘subjective’ evaluation, given mid-way through the semester as well as formal course evaluations (SEIs).

### Textbooks/cost

There will be one assigned text for the course: the Penguin Classics edition of *Capital, Volume 1* (Ben Fowkes, translator), which can be bought for less than \$15. Other readings will be available on Carmen, and we will take advantage of abundant supplemental material devoted to Marx’s *Capital* that is available online.

### Attachments

- Draft syllabus
- Letters of support from the Dan Sui (chair, Geography) and Barry Shank (chair, Comparative Studies)

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<sup>1</sup> With one exception, “Historical Materialism,” a course taught occasionally by Kevin Cox since the 1980s. Dr. Cox is however retiring this year. Moreover our approach is quite different from Dr. Cox’s.

# An introduction to critical political economy: Marx's *Capital*, culture and geography

5 credits; no prerequisites

Professors:	Joel Wainwright (Geography)	Eugene Holland (Comparative Studies)
Email:	wainwright.11@osu.edu	holland.1@osu.edu
Office:	1169 Derby Hall	442 Hagerty Hall
Office hours:	Thursday, 3.45-5:00 PM	Friday, 1:00-2:30 PM

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What, exactly, is capitalism? When did it come to be the dominant economic system, and why? Is deep inequality inevitable? Is capitalism sustainable? This course examines these questions through an analysis of Karl Marx's magnum opus, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, one of the most profound works in the Western tradition. Like Shakespeare or Freud, Marx is no stuffy thinker that one should read simply to satisfy college requirements. The problems under analysis in *Capital* remain significant today. And Marx's approach remains useful, so long as it is applied *critically*, which means, in the first instance, *understood*. We will begin by reading selections from three great political economists (and Marx's key interlocutors): Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Samuel Bailey. After reading *Capital*, we will spend one week reflecting on *Capital* as a work of literature and conclude with one week on the geographical (global) dimensions of capitalism today.

## Course requirements

Attendance and participation	10 %
Weekly papers (10)	65 %
Final exam	25 %

For our class discussions to be effective, you must come to class prepared. You must read all of the material for the class carefully and bring questions on the readings with you to each class. This is your major responsibility for the course, as well as the key to your success in this class.

Attendance and participation are required and graded. (If you cannot attend class because of illness, you must bring a signed note from a doctor excusing you from class.) Participation is principally measured by the quality of your contributions to discussions.

You will write weekly papers (details below) and take a final exam comprised of three or four essay questions. We may also give a pop quiz or two.

Our course has one assigned textbooks: Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*. Please purchase the Penguin Classics edition (Ben Fowkes, translator). It may be purchased at the bookstore or on-line. Additional reading materials will be made available via Carmen.

## Course plan at a glance

#	Day	Date	Notes	Reading assignment
				* = Carmen; # = chapter in <i>Capital</i>
1	Monday	12-Jan	Course introduction	
2	Wednesday	14-Jan	Adam Smith	Adam Smith*
	Monday	19-Jan	MLK day: no class	
3	Wednesday	21-Jan	David Ricardo	David Ricardo*
4	Monday	26-Jan	Samuel Bailey	Samuel Bailey*
5	Wednesday	28-Jan	Marx's critique of classical value theory	1 (sections 1-3)
6	Monday	3-Feb	Commodity fetishism	1 (section 4)
7	Wednesday	5-Feb	Exchange	2
8	Monday	10-Feb	Money and circulation	3
9	Wednesday	12-Feb	The general formula for capital	4 & 5
10	Monday	17-Feb	The sale and purchase of labor power	6 & 7
11	Wednesday	19-Feb	Absolute surplus value	8 & 9
12	Monday	24-Feb	The working day part 1	10 (sections 1-4)
13	Wednesday	26-Feb	The working day part 2	10 (sections 5-7)
14	Monday	2-Mar	Relative surplus value part 1	11 & 12
15	Wednesday	4-Mar	Relative surplus value part 2	13 & 14
16	Monday	9-Mar	Machinery part 1	15 (sections 1-5)
17	Wednesday	11-Mar	Machinery part 2	15 (sections 6-10)
			March 16-March 20: Spring break	
18	Monday	23-Mar	Accumulation of capital part 1	19, 23
19	Wednesday	25-Mar	Accumulation of capital part 2	24
20	Monday	30-Mar	The general law of capitalist accumulation 1	25 (sections 1-3)
21	Wednesday	1-Apr	The general law of capitalist accumulation 2	25 (sections 4-5)
22	Monday	6-Apr	Primitive accumulation part 1	26 & 27
23	Wednesday	8-Apr	Primitive accumulation part 2	28-33
24	Monday	13-Apr	<i>Capital</i> as culture: monsters & zombies part 1	
25	Wednesday	15-Apr	<i>Capital</i> as culture: monsters & zombies part 2	
26	Monday	20-Apr	<i>Capital</i> & contemporary global geography 1	Jameson*
27	Wednesday	22-Apr	<i>Capital</i> & contemporary global geography 2	22, Amin*
28	Monday	27-Apr	Last day of classes: summing up	
			April 29 (W)-May 5 (Tu) final exams	

## **The weekly papers**

Your central task in this course is to write a series of papers that reflect your analysis of the assigned texts. Each Monday you will turn in a short paper that eloquently summarizes the central arguments from the assigned material. Essays should be concise and coherent. As a general guideline, your papers should be two pages long, double spaced, 12 point Times New Roman. (We will provide further guidance on your papers as the course progresses.)

The first paper is due Monday, January 26 (on Bailey's critique of Ricardo's value theory). From that point, you will have a paper due on each subsequent Monday (except for the first day after Spring break, March 23, and the final day of class, April 27). This comprises 11 papers. Your final grade will be calculated on the basis of 10 papers. If you complete all 11 papers, we will drop your lowest grade.

## **The rules: late work, plagiarism, and so forth**

Your papers should be turned in on paper (not via email) at the start of class on Monday. If you arrive late for class, your paper is late. You may turn in your paper late only until the start of Wednesday's class. If you wish to turn in your paper late, have it time-stamped in the department of comparative studies or geography office and then place your paper in our mailbox (in the appropriate department mailroom). Late work loses 15% per day. E.g., a paper that is turned in two days late and earns a grade of 9/10 would be scored 6/10.

Because our final exam is essay-based and unique to each class, it cannot be taken late or made up. Exceptions are rare – emergencies only – and up to our discretion. Arrangements for a make-up exam should be made before the exam is distributed.

As many of us are easily distracted by the use of cell phones, computers, recording devices, and the like, such equipment should be turned off and put away during class.

Grading options for the course are A,A-,B+,B-,C+,C-,D+,D, E. An 'I', or Incomplete, will only be given under special circumstances and where the instructor has made an arrangement with the student before the end of the quarter. If you wish to request an 'I', be prepared to explain why this is the appropriate grade.

Any academic misconduct, such as plagiarizing, will be reported to Ohio State's Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). They have prepared a statement on academic integrity: see next page; please read it carefully.

**Accommodation will be made for any student with special needs based on the impact of a disability. Please contact the instructor and also the Office for Disability Services at 292-3307, or go to 150 Pomerene Hall.**

## **Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity**

Ohio State Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, students are expected to complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. The following suggestions will help you preserve academic integrity[...].

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOURCES THAT YOU USE WHEN COMPLETING ASSIGNMENTS:** If you use another person's thoughts, ideas, or words in your work, you must acknowledge this fact. This applies regardless of whose thoughts, ideas, or words you use as well as the source of the information. If you do not acknowledge the work of others, you are implying that another person's work is your own, and such actions constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism is the theft of another's intellectual property [...].

2. **AVOID SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR:** Do not put yourself in a position where an instructor might suspect that you are cheating or that you have cheated. Even if you have not cheated, the mere suspicion of dishonesty might undermine an instructor's confidence in your work. Avoiding some of the most common types of suspicious behavior is simple. Before an examination, check your surroundings carefully and make sure that all of your notes are put away and your books are closed. An errant page of notes on the floor or an open book could be construed as a "cheat sheet." Keep your eyes on your own work. [...]

3. **DO NOT FABRICATE INFORMATION:** Never make-up data, literature citations, experimental results, or any other type of information that is used in an academic or scholarly assignment.

4. **DO NOT FALSIFY ANY TYPE OF RECORD:** Do not alter, misuse, produce, or reproduce any University form or document or other type of form or document. Do not sign another person's name to any form or record (University or otherwise), and do not sign your name to any form or record that contains inaccurate or fraudulent information. Once an assignment has been graded and returned to you, do not alter it and ask that it be graded again. [...]

5. **DO NOT GIVE IN TO PEER PRESSURE:** Friends can be a tremendous help to one another when studying for exams or completing course assignments. However, don't let your friendships with others jeopardize your college career. Before lending or giving any type of information to a friend or acquaintance, consider carefully what you are lending (giving), what your friend might do with it, and what the consequences might be if your friend misuses it. [...]

6. **DO NOT SUBMIT THE SAME WORK FOR CREDIT IN TWO COURSES:** Instructors do not give grades in a course, rather students earn their grades. Thus, instructors expect that students will earn their grades by completing all course requirements (assignments) while they are actually enrolled in the course. If a student uses his/her work from one course to satisfy the requirements of a different course, that student is not only violating the spirit of the assignment, but he/she is also putting other students in the course at a disadvantage. Even though it might be your own work, you are not permitted to turn in the same work to meet the requirements of more than one course. [...]

7. **DO YOUR OWN WORK:** When you turn in an assignment with only your name on it, then the work on that assignment should be yours and yours alone. This means that you should not copy any work done by or work together with another student (or other person). [...]

8. **MANAGE YOUR TIME:** Do not put off your assignments until the last minute. If you do, you might put yourself in a position where your only options are to turn in an incomplete (or no) assignment or to cheat. [...]

9. **PROTECT YOUR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS:** The assignments that you complete as a student are your "intellectual property," and you should protect your intellectual property just as you would any of your other property.[...]

10. **READ THE COURSE SYLLABUS AND ASK QUESTIONS:** Many instructors prepare and distribute (or make available on a web site) a course syllabus. Read the course syllabus for every course you take!





May 22, 2014

Executive Dean David Manderscheid  
College of Arts and Sciences  
The Ohio State University

Dear Dean Manderscheid,

I write in support of the team-teaching proposal authored by Eugene Holland (Comparative Studies and Joel Wainwright (Geology), "Reading *Capital*, an introduction to critical political economy." The course will provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to read closely one of the central texts in Western thought, Karl Marx's *Capital, Volume I* and to come to terms with the equal importance of both of the words that make up the term "political economy." As the authors of the proposal make clear, current events demonstrate the importance of an informed citizenry armed with the analytical tools of political economy. The radical consequences of blind adherence to neo-classical economics, capitalist social relations, and the short-term orientation of market-driven decision-making are becoming painfully clear (ie. extreme inequality, disruptive climate change, global political upheavals, etc.). The need for a new generation of leaders who are not afraid to challenge current economic dogma has never been more urgent. This course will help to develop an awareness of the political stakes inherent in the foundational assumptions that underlie economic systems. This course's focus on contesting economic models will enable students to think critically about the values that are reinforced and reproduced in the everyday operations of the economy. It will make a substantive and hopefully long-lasting contribution to the curriculum of Comparative Studies.

Holland and Wainwright bring together the attentiveness to language and meaning privileged by the humanities with the focus on the movements of people and the analysis of political organizations common to much of the social sciences. The geographical reach of their interests ranges from Europe to Latin America. They approach *Capital* differently as well. The book comes out of a moment in European intellectual history as much as it attempts to diagnose the contradictions of a historically particular form of economic relations. Together these professors will provide engaged students with the opportunity to unveil the assumptions behind the apparent common sense of industrial and post-industrial capitalism. As a result students will develop the capacity to debate the most serious of political economic questions, a skill that is much needed now.



This class is fundamentally comparative in its approach and deeply concerned with the most serious issues of global citizenship and social justice. Its interdisciplinary range is personified in the two instructors, but can be continued beyond their individual participation with similar value and significance by other members of both departments (I think of Philip Armstrong and Matt Coleman, for instance). This course will make a vital contribution to the curriculum of Comparative Studies. I am happy to endorse this proposal with enthusiasm.

Yours,

Barry Shank  
Professor & Chair



**May 17, 2014**

**To: David Manderscheid, Executive Dean and Vice Provost**

**From: Daniel Sui, Professor & Chair** 

**Re: Team teaching proposal by Wainwright and Holland**

I am writing you to offer my enthusiastic support for a team teaching proposal by Professor Joel Wainwright (Geography) and Professor Eugene Holland (Comparative Studies). In response to your call for proposals issued back on March 13, 2014, my colleague Joel Wainwright, in close collaboration with Eugene Holland, has developed an innovative course to be team-taught in SP 15.

After reviewing the course proposal and syllabi, I confirm that the proposed course aims to address a suite of complex and challenging issues at the intersection of capitalism, political economy, and inequality. Those questions are at the core of critical human geography that attracts growing interests from our students. The proposed new course will fill in an important lacunae in our current curriculum for the urban, regional, and global studies (URGS) track. In effect, the creation of this new course would help our department's human geography curriculum by replacing/enhancing an outmoded course that has been taught by a retiring professor with a new version that will be more exciting for undergraduates.

I'd also alert you that Professor Joel Wainwright has distinguished himself in teaching by winning multiple teaching awards and recognitions in recent years, including the Alumni Teaching Award in 2011, the PanHellenic Award for Outstanding Commitment to Student Education in 2012, and the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Award (finalist) in both 2009 and 2014. Professor Wainwright's pedagogic achievements have made him uniquely suited for this team-teaching opportunity. I have no doubts whatsoever that Professor Wainwright will succeed in this new course.