Course Description:

In this course we will explore Hannah Arendt’s conception of the complex relationship between imagination and politics. As a sensitive observer of the 20th century politics, Arendt theorized both the dangers and the promises of imagination. We will begin by seeking to understand, in the context of her analysis of totalitarianism, why and how the lack of imagination and common sense can lead to moral and political irresponsibility and, eventually, to political decisions that make genocide possible. At the same time, we will see how escapist imagination plays an essential role in totalitarian propaganda and ideology, thus making rule by terror possible. This indicates that one essential aim of this course will be to understand the difference between a harmful and a benign form of political imagination.

However, such a distinction prepares the ground for the attempt to understand why Arendt grants imagination such an important role in politics, more precisely, in the construction of what she calls the world, namely, the public and common realm of individual deeds and speeches. Part of this will be the effort to comprehend the role that culture and, in particular, the work of art play in politics. Such a project will provide us with the opportunity to discuss the several ways in which art and artists can contribute to politics and to its understanding. In a nutshell, it will provide us with the opportunity to explore how artists and their imagination can contribute to political action and political thinking, as well as to the attempt of the philosopher to understand (the uncanny, sometimes, character of) political phenomena.

Course Objectives:

1. One general objective is to learn about and understand Arendt’s conception of politics, as well as her conception of the political role of culture and the work of art.
2. A more particular objective is to learn about and understand Arendt’s conception of imagination and politics and see how this applies to different aspects of political action and thinking.
3. To become better readers, thinkers, speakers, and writers.
4. To learn why reading Arendt has any relevance for those who seek to understand politics and the political role of culture and art at the beginning of the 21st century, particularly, in connection with issues such as, globalization, human rights, refugees, and power.
Achieving the Course Objectives:

We will learn about Arendt’s conception of the relationship between imagination and politics by carefully reading the following books and other short articles and papers:


Course Requirements:

1. Two short papers on topics provided by the professor (15% each). First short paper is due on October 4. Second short paper is due on November 1.
2. One research paper on a topic chosen by the student and discussed with the professor (40%)
3. One in-class presentation (15%)
4. Active and informed class participation (15%)

What is Expected from the Students?

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments, and use their imagination in a reflective and critical manner. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments and attend class regularly. Students must be fully prepared at all times to discuss the readings and concepts from the previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their writing and in-class discussion.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

September 13: Introduction

September 15: Why Hannah Arendt?

September 17: Why Imagination and Politics?
**September 20:** The Case of Adolf Eichmann  

**September 22:** The Case of Adolf Eichmann  

**September 24:** Totalitarian Propaganda and Fiction  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, “Totalitarian Propaganda.”

**September 27:** Totalitarian Organization: Leaders and Citizens  

**September 29:** Total Domination  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, “Total Domination.”

**October 1:** Ideology, Terror, and Politics  

**October 4:** Understanding and Political Thinking  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics” (e-reserve)

**October 6:** Understanding and Political Thinking  

**October 8:** The Nature of Political Judgment  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, pages 7-33

**October 11:** Critical Thinking and Imagination  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, pages 33-51

**October 13:** The Public Realm  

**October 15:** Common Sense, Imagination, and the Public Realm  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, pages 51-77  
October 20: *Labor, Work, Action*

October 22: There is no class. I will be attending The Annual Conference of the Association for Political Theory, at Reed College, in Portland, Oregon. Keep up with your reading.

October 25: *Culture and Politics*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*.

October 27: *Culture and Politics*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Culture and Politics,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*.

October 29: *The Political Role of the Work of Art*

November 1: *Artists and Politics: Imagination and Society*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, “Between Vice and Crime (On Proust),” “The Imperialist Character (On Kipling),” and “What is Permitted to Jove: Reflections on the Poet Bertolt Brecht and His Relation to Politics” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*.

November 3: *Artists and Politics: Imagination’s Power to Change the World*

November 5: *Artists and Politics: Imagination and Resistance*

November 8: *Artists and Politics: Imagination and Friendship*

November 10: *Artists and Politics: Imagination and Storytelling*

November 12: *Final Reflections*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, “The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question” (e-reserve)

November 15: *Final Reflections*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, Peace or Armistice in the Middle East’ (e-reserve)

November 17: *Final Discussion*