Politics, Law and Social Thought (PLST) is an interdisciplinary minor open to all undergraduate students at Rice from all backgrounds. Its task is the study of political ideas in their philosophical and historical contexts as well as with regard to their effects on constitutional law and social and political practices.

The central focus of the minor is political theory, taken in a wide sense to mean the theory and philosophy of how polities form, function, and fail. The minor has a strong orientation toward works of political, legal, and social philosophy, understood in their historical context. Politics, Law and Social Thought is a program of study that enables Rice students to engage successfully with the “big” political questions relevant to contemporary society in a global setting: Why democracy? What are the foundations of law? What is political liberty? What is political citizenship? Are states necessary? How do normative political and social orders come into existence? Is there a philosophical justification for human rights?

Minor


Politics, Law and Social Thought does currently not offer an academic program at the graduate level.

Co-Directors

Christian J. Emden
Aysha Pollnitz

Humanities Faculty Director, Law, Justice and Society Scholars

Shannon LaBove

Associate Professors

David Leebron
Melissa Marschall
Donald Morrison
George Sher
Lora Wildenthal
Harvey Yunis

Assistant Professors

Andrea S. Ballestero
Aysha Pollnitz
Vida Yao

Professors in the Practice

Steven W. Lewis
Rodolfo Ramirez

Lecturers

Shannon LaBove
Robert Werth

For Rice University degree-granting programs:
To view the list of official course offerings, please see Rice’s Course Catalog (https://courses.rice.edu/admweb/ISWKSCAT.cat?p_action=cata)
To view the most recent semester’s course schedule, please see Rice’s Course Schedule (https://courses.rice.edu/admweb/ISWKSCAT.cat)

Politics, Law and Social Thought (PLST)

PLST 238 - SPECIAL TOPICS
Short Title: SPECIAL TOPICS
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Internship/Practicum, Lecture, Laboratory, Seminar
Credit Hours: 1-4
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Lower-Level
Description: Topics and credit hours may vary each semester. Contact department for current semester’s topic(s). Repeatable for Credit.
PLST 301 - MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT: MACHIAVELLI TO RAWLS
Short Title: MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Lecture
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Introduction to political theory and political philosophy from the Renaissance to the present: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Montesquieu, Kant, Hegel, Constant, Mill Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Habermas, and Rawls. Topics include human rights, political power, citizenship, democracy, the modern state. Required core course for minor in Politics, Law, and Social Thought.

PLST 302 - CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY
Short Title: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Lecture
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Introduction to contemporary political theory. Topics include freedom, democracy, empire, citizenship, human rights, radical democracy, protest and civil disobedience, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, postcolonial political thought, transnational and global governance.

PLST 303 - HOW DEMOCRACY FAILS
Short Title: HOW DEMOCRACY FAILS
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Seminar
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Course examines the conditions under which democracies and republics can fail. Draws on political theory, constitutional debates, and historical examples. Topics include: constitutional crises, states of emergency, popular sovereignty, populism, nationalism, revolution, political violence, civil disobedience, post-democracy, illiberal democracy, and neoliberalism.

PLST 305 - INTRODUCTION TO LAW
Short Title: INTRODUCTION TO LAW
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Lecture
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Course introduces students to the U.S. legal system and provides them with a preview of the first year of law school, including the basic principles of Tort, Contract, Criminal, and Criminal Procedure Law. Additionally, the class will teach students how to conduct appellate argument and to write briefs. Mutually Exclusive: Credit cannot be earned for PLST 305 and COLL 201.

PLST 316 - DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL THEORY IN ANCIENT GREECE
Short Title: DEMOCRACY & POLITICAL THEORY
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Lecture
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: The Greeks created political society and studied political society in order to understand and improve it. One particular form of political society, democracy, reached its pinnacle in Athens. We shall attempt to understand how ancient Greeks thought about politics from the rudimentary beginnings in Homer to the complex, incisive arguments of Aristotle. Cross-list: CLAS 316.

PLST 401 - LAW, JUSTICE AND SOCIETY SCHOLARS JUDICIAL PRACTICUM
Short Title: LJSS LEGAL PRACTICUM
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Internship/Practicum
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: This course focuses on the public and private practice sectors of the legal profession through a work experience coupled with classroom instruction at Rice. The goal is to expose undergraduates to the field of law through structured on-site experiences, relevant coursework, and professional development opportunities. Instructor Permission Required. Mutually Exclusive: Credit cannot be earned for PLST 401 and HUMA 404/SOSC 405. Repeatable for Credit.

PLST 402 - LAW, JUSTICE AND SOCIETY SCHOLARS JUDICIAL PRACTICUM
Short Title: LJSS LEGAL PRACTICUM
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Internship/Practicum
Credit Hours: 3
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Students will participate in a semester-long "practicum" with a sitting judge (federal, or Texas appellate) in Houston. This program is designed to give select Rice undergraduates a broad and practical introduction to what lawyers do in court and how judges and the law clerks who work with them think about the questions they are asked to resolve. Instructor Permission Required. Mutually Exclusive: Credit cannot be earned for PLST 402 and HUMA 404/SOSC 406.

PLST 477 - SPECIAL TOPICS
Short Title: SPECIAL TOPICS
Department: Politics Law Social Thought
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Type: Internship/Practicum, Seminar, Lecture, Laboratory
Credit Hours: 1-4
Restrictions: Enrollment is limited to Undergraduate, Undergraduate Professional or Visiting Undergraduate level students.
Course Level: Undergraduate Upper-Level
Description: Topics and credit hours may vary each semester. Contact department for current semester's topic(s). Repeatable for Credit.
Description and Code Legend

Note: Internally, the university uses the following descriptions, codes, and abbreviations for this academic program. The following is a quick reference:

Course Catalog/Schedule
• Course offerings/subject codes: PLST

Program Description and Code
• Classical and European Studies: PLST

Undergraduate Minor Description and Code
• Minor in Politics, Law and Social Thought: PLST