

PSC 402
FALL 2024



POLITICS OF THE UNDEAD

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JESS MORRISSETTE

MEETINGS: TU/TH 2:00-3:15, SMITH HALL 433

OFFICE HOURS: M 1-4 AND BY APPOINTMENT

OFFICE LOCATION: SMITH HALL 706

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

An exploration of political thought, international relations theory, and political economy through the pop cultural lens of vampires, zombies, and other undead creatures (3 credit hours).

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

My name is Dr. Jess Morrissette; I'm a Professor in the Department of Political Science, and this is my seventeenth year here at Marshall University. I earned my MA from Virginia Tech and my Ph.D. from the University of Georgia, where I wrote my dissertation about interstate conflict driven by water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa. My areas of specialization are International Relations and Comparative Politics, and I have published on topics ranging from resource-based conflict to Russian foreign policy to the rise of extremist movements. In recent years, my research has focused increasingly on exploring the politics of popular culture and, more specifically, video games.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to...	How we will practice this outcome	How we will assess this outcome
<i>Demonstrate how popular culture can contribute to the study of political science.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays, term paper
<i>Analyze depictions of power and powerlessness in fictional portrayals of the undead.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays
<i>Assess key theories, concepts, and debates in the field of political science (including feminist thought, the Marxist critique of capitalism, social contract theory, international relations theory, etc.) using the undead metaphor.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Exams, essays
<i>Produce an original analytical work utilizing the undead metaphor to explore a political question.</i>	Discussions, research presentations, in-class activities	Term paper
<i>Effectively combat the undead menace through the power of critical thinking.</i>	Lectures, discussions, in-class activities	Survival

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Your grade is based on your performance on two exams, two papers, and participation. No extra credit will be awarded—no exceptions. Your course grade is determined as follows:

5%	Participation	A =	90-100%
15%	Essay of the Living Dead	B =	80-89%
25%	Midterm Exam	C =	70-79%
30%	Politics of the Undead Paper	D =	60-69%
25%	Final Exam	F ≤	59%

Course grades are nonnegotiable and won't be changed unless there is a documented mistake in either calculating or recording your grade.

CONTENT WARNING

Over the course of the semester, we will encounter mature content that some would consider violent, gory, disgusting, and otherwise disturbing. Furthermore, indelicate language and explicit sexual content may creep into some of the creative works we study. If you feel uncomfortable reading, viewing, and discussing this kind of material, I encourage you to consider a different class.

SERIOUSLY, YOU GUYS

If things that go bump, “Bleh!”, or “Braaaaaaaains!” in the night upset you, please don't take this course.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Schweitzer, *Going Viral: Zombies, Viruses, and the End of the World*
- Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies: Apocalypse Edition*
- Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*
- *The Last of Us* (Season 1) — available via digital platforms and physical media

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is required in this class, and students are expected to have read and be ready to discuss all assigned readings prior to class. Students will also be graded based on their class participation—engaging in discussion of the readings and current political events, asking questions, and so forth. Once again, attendance is clearly important; if you aren't in class, you can't participate.

The participation grade will be determined as follows: 5 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and make valuable contributions to class discussion on a regular basis; 4 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and contribute to discussions occasionally; 3 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently, but seldom participate in class discussions. Attendance grades of 2, 1, and 0 points are reserved for those students who fail to attend class regularly and therefore cannot participate meaningfully in class discussions.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Please silence your cell phone prior to the start of class.

Classroom discussions will be conducted in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. Differences of opinion and the challenging of viewpoints—including those of the instructor—are part of the learning experience, but they should occur in a manner that opens up dialogue without being disrespectful, hostile, or threatening toward others.

Unwelcome conduct directed toward another person based upon that person's actual or perceived race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, political affiliation, disability, age, or veteran status will not be permitted. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in dismissal from class.

This course supports and respects all gender expressions and identities. If you use a name different than what is listed on the class roster, please let me know and I will gladly refer to you by your correct name and pronouns.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are expected to adhere to the University's policies concerning academic honesty. Cheating or plagiarism on any exam, quiz, or assignment will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under University policies. **The penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade for the course.**

Cheating is defined by the University as "[a]ny action which if known to the instructor in the course of study would be prohibited." This includes, but is not limited to, the use of any unauthorized materials or assistance during an academic exercise.

The University defines plagiarism as "[s]ubmitting as one's own work or creation any material or an idea wholly or in part created by another." Furthermore, it is "the student's responsibility to clearly distinguish his/her own work from that created by others. This includes the proper use of quotation marks, paraphrase and the citation of the original source. Students are responsible for both intentional and unintentional acts of plagiarism."

GENERATIVE AI

Students are prohibited from using generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, etc.) in any way on any assignment in this course. The use of generative AI in this course will be considered a violation of both Marshall's Academic Dishonesty Policy and the Student Code of Conduct. As noted above, **the penalty for academic dishonesty is a failing grade for the course.**

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments will be assessed a 10% penalty per week for the first three weeks (starting the day after the assignment was originally due and with a maximum penalty of 30%).

The final day to submit all missing assignments for the semester is Friday, December 6.

EMAIL POLICY

Please check your Marshall email account regularly. Important announcements may be sent to your "@marshall.edu" email address during the semester.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

All members of the Marshall University community are expected to always observe health and safety protocols. This includes general health and safety protocols as well as specific protocols that might emerge in response to community and campus health conditions.

CAMPUS CARRY POLICY

University Policy, UPGA-12 (Campus Carry Policy) derives its authority from West Virginia State law, including the Campus Self-defense Act (W. Va. Code § 18B-4-5b). It pertains to the exercise of Concealed Carry on Marshall University's campus, except in designated areas, by individuals with a valid permit to Conceal Carry.

Individuals who choose to Conceal Carry are responsible for knowing and understanding all applicable federal, state, and local laws and Marshall University Board of Governors Rules, University Policies, and Administrative Procedures. University Policy, UPGA-12 applies to areas of campus and buildings that are directly under the possession or control of Marshall University.

Concealed Handguns are not observable to others and must be holstered and concealed on the body of the permit holder or in a personal carrier, such as a backpack, purse, or other bag that remains under the exclusive and uninterrupted control of the permit holder. This includes wearing the personal carrier with a strap, carrying or holding the personal carrier, or setting the personal carrier next to or within your immediate reach at all times. If your participation in class activities impedes your ability to maintain constant control of your Handgun, please make alternate arrangements prior to coming to class.

OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the following University Policies. Please read the full text of each policy by going to <https://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/>.

- Academic Dishonesty Policy
- Academic Dismissal Policy
- Academic Forgiveness Policy
- Academic Probation and Suspension Policy
- Affirmative Action Policy
- Pre-Finals Week Policy
- D/F Repeat Rule
- Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates
- Inclement Weather Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy- Title IX prohibits the harassment of students based on sex, which includes pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions. This includes that students will not be penalized for taking medically necessary leave related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions. Marshall's Title IX Office may be contacted at TitleIX@marshall.edu.
- Students with Disabilities (Policies and Procedures)
- University Computing Services Acceptable Use Policy

ASSIGNMENTS

- **Essay of the Living Dead:** After watching the 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* in class, you will write a 3-page essay that explores the concept of "politics" and analyzes how the film can be considered "political." Begin by defining "politics" in your own words, drawing on class discussions, readings, or your understanding of the term. Then, discuss how *Night of the Living Dead* reflects political themes or issues, such as social justice, race, gender, power, or government authority. Support your analysis by citing specific scenes, dialogue, or characters from the film that illustrate these political elements. Be sure to explain how these examples connect to your definition of politics, demonstrating a clear understanding of both the concept and the film.
- **Exams:** You will complete take-home midterm and final exams this semester. Approximately one week prior to the respective due-dates, I will distribute a set of essay questions. In turn, students will submit the completed exams on the dates specified in the course schedule. Please note that while these are take-home exams, *they are still exams*. In other words, students are not allowed to collaborate with one another in the completion of the exams. I will provide more details as the exams approach.
- **Politics of the Undead Paper:** For your term paper, you will develop an original argument exploring the intersection of politics and the undead. Possible approaches include:
 - **Applying the Undead Metaphor:** Use the undead as a metaphor to illustrate or explain a political concept or theory. For example, consider how vampire fiction might enhance our understanding of Marx's critique of capitalism.
 - **Analyzing Political Content in Undead Media:** Choose a work of undead media and analyze its political content. This could involve examining explicit political themes or exploring subtextual elements, such as what *The Last of Us* reveals about gender politics.
 - **Tracing a Political Theme Across Works:** Examine how a specific political theme is portrayed across multiple fictional works. For instance, analyze how George A. Romero's treatment of race evolves throughout his films.

Be both creative and critical in your analysis, making sure your argument is well-supported by evidence from the texts you discuss. Your paper should be approximately 8 pages long. I will grade your work based on the quality of your analysis, your application of course concepts, and the clarity and organization of your writing.

Submit your proposed topic on Blackboard for approval by October 18. The final term paper is due on November 15.

- Please consider the following guidelines while completing your writing assignments:
 - You will submit your paper electronically via MUOnline.
 - Be sure to include a brief introduction that states the purpose of your paper, as well as a concise conclusion that sums up what you have written.
 - Always cite your sources! You are welcome to use any widely accepted citation style (e.g. MLA, APA, APSA, Chicago). Be sure to make it clear where you found any “outside” information in your essay. This includes not only citing direct quotations, **but also any paraphrased material or statistics**. As a rule of thumb, any information those you decide to include in the paper and didn’t know before you began working on the project merits a citation. Also, include a “works cited” page at the end of your essays and exams. Failure to properly cite your sources constitutes **PLAGIARISM**.
 - Proofread your essays! Most grammatical and typographical errors can be easily caught with a simple read-through before a paper is submitted.
 - Papers should conform to the suggested lengths provided above (title pages and works cited pages do not count toward the suggested length). Papers should be double-spaced with 1” margins and typed using the standard 12-point Times/Times New Roman font (or the Macintosh equivalent). Please include page numbers in the upper right-hand corner of your pages.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of August 19: Pop Culture and Politics

- Smith and Smith, “Defining Pop Culture” (online)
- Sellnow, “What Is Popular Culture and Why Study It?” (online)

Week of August 26: Open Graves, Open Minds — Politics and the Undead

- Vargas, “Dead Serious: Evil and the Ontology of the Undead” (online)
- Smith, “The Zombie Threat to Democracy” (online)

Week of September 2: “They’re Coming to Get You, Barbara!”

- In-class screening: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- Shaviro, “Contagious Allegories: George Romero” (online)

Week of September 9: “Who the Hell Cares about the Zombie Apocalypse? Let’s Go Shopping!”

- In-class screening: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)
- Schweitzer, Introduction

**ESSAY OF THE LIVING DEAD
Due Friday, September 13**

Week of September 16: The Political Economy of the Living Dead

- Walker, “When There’s No More Room in Hell, the Dead Will Shop the Earth” (online)
- Schweitzer, Chapter 1
- No class on Thursday!

Week of September 23: Vampire Capitalists and Zombie Consumers

- Sellnow, “A Marxist Perspective” (online)
- Moretti, “A Capital Dracula” (online)
- Neocleous, “The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires” (online)
- Schweitzer, Chapter 2

Week of September 30: A War of All Against All — Zombies and the Social Contract

- Hobbes, “Excerpt from *Leviathan*” (online)
- Boudreaux, “*The Last of Us*, Hobbes, and the State of Nature” (online)
- Sheppard, “Realistically, Nice Guys Finish Last” (online)
- Murray, “When They Aren’t Eating Us, They Bring Us Together...” (online)
- Barkman, “I Don’t Think Those Rules Apply Anymore” (online)

Week of October 7: “The Only People Who Can Betray Us Are the Ones We Trust”

- In-class screening: *The Last of Us* (Episode 1: “When You’re Lost in the Darkness”)
- Schweitzer, Chapter 3
- No class on Thursday!

MIDTERM EXAM
Due Friday, October 11

Week of October 14: Dracula, the Other, and Orientalism

- Said, “Orientalism: Introduction” (online)
- Arata, “The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” (online)
- Mikdadi, “Orientalism and the Representation of ‘Others’ in *The Mummy*” (online)
- Hamako, “Zombie Orientals Ate My Brain! Orientalism in Contemporary Zombie Stories” (online)
- *The Last of Us*, Episode 2

POLITICS OF THE UNDEAD TOPICS DUE
Due Friday, October 18

Week of October 21: Race, Ethnicity, and the Undead

- Saunders, “Zombies in the Colonies” (online)
- Bishop, “The Sub-Subaltern Monster” (online)
- Comentale, “Zombie Race” (online)
- Schweitzer, Chapter 4 and Conclusion
- *The Last of Us*, Episode 3

Week of October 28: Gender, Sexuality, and the Undead

- Patterson, "Cannibalizing Gender & Genre: A Feminist Re-Vision of Romero's Zombie Films"
- Barkman, "Women in a Zombie Apocalypse" (online)
- Pye and O'Sullivan, "Dead Man's Party" (online)
- Peppers-Bates and Bernard, "Ellie and Abby: Queer Feminist Icons" (online)
- *The Last of Us*, Episode 4

Week of November 4: Zombies and International Relations

- Drezner, "Preface" through "The Supergendered Politics of the Posthuman World"
- Brooks, Introduction through "Turning the Tide"
- *The Last of Us*, Episode 5

Week of November 11: Zombies in a Globalized World

- Drezner, "Subalternity and the Living Dead" through Epilogue
- Brooks, "Home Front USA" through "Good-Byes"
- *The Last of Us*, Episode 6

POLITICS OF THE UNDEAD PAPER DUE
Due Friday, November 15

Week of November 18: COVID and the Outbreak Narrative

- *The Last of Us*, Episode 7

Week of November 25: Thanksgiving Break!

- *The Last of Us*, Episode 8

Week of December 2: (Un)Dead Week

- In-class screening: *The Last of Us* (Episode 9: "Look for the Light")

FINAL EXAM
Due Friday, December 6

Please note that all assignments are tentative. Readings, papers, and exams may be removed, added, or moved to a different day based on our progress in the semester. If there are any changes to the syllabus, the version currently posted on Blackboard is the "official" version.

WANT A MINOR THAT REALLY **POPS?**

**AFTER COMPLETING
THIS COURSE,
YOU ONLY NEED
12 MORE
CREDIT HOURS
FOR A MINOR
IN POP CULTURE
STUDIES!**



CONTACT DR. MORRISSETTE FOR MORE INFORMATION!