

PSC 101: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

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Classes held in Cooke 121

Course Description

Explores the theory and practice of the American political system; the three government branches, federalism, political parties, groups in the electoral and governmental process, public policy making, and contemporary political problems.

Readings

There is one required text for the course (listed below). Readings from *The Federalist* are all available online, just search for the one that you want—e.g., *Federalist* 10. That being said, I would encourage you to own a copy (they're cheap).

An addition, I encourage you to become an active and avid reader of at least one news source featuring politically relevant content each and every day. A large component of this course involves increasing our political awareness and building the skills necessary to become effective consumers of media and political information.

Book:

Kollman, Ken. 2014. *The American Political System*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Readings from the textbook (and elsewhere) are to be completed before class. For instance, if we are talking about Public Opinion in class on Tuesday the 21st of April at 9:30AM, I expect you to have finished the chapter by 9:29AM that same day.

Requirements

There are four exams in this course, including three midterms and a cumulative final. I will drop the lowest of the three midterms. The exams are weighted equally, with each comprising a third of your grade. Attendance is not, strictly speaking, a component of your grade, but since the lectures cover material that goes far beyond what is included in your textbook, it will be extremely difficult to do well in the course if you do not attend class. In addition, I reserve the right to give reading quizzes if I feel that the class as a whole is not keeping up with the textbook. In this event I will make the reading quizzes worth ten percent of the overall grade (with each exam counting as 30 percent).

Except in extreme cases, missed exams are covered by the above articulated policy of dropping the lowest of the four exam grades.

Extra Credit

There will be different opportunities for students to gain a maximum of 18 points of extra credit (Note: Extra credit cannot exceed 18 points).

One possibility is called Learner's Journals: Students can submit reflective essays on UBLearns to articulate personal learning experiences in this class. Each entry should be 400-500 words (two pages double-spaced) and synthesize your key learning from class discussions, lectures, activities, and/or readings. Each journal entry is worth up to 3 points and each student may submit up to 6 journals. Do understand, however, that quality matters, and that simply turning in a journal entry is not sufficient to earn all possible points

Another possibility is participating in research studies. Each hour of a study you participate in will gain you 3 points. (Note: Research credit hours are determined by the individual study; a 0-30 minute study = .5 credit hours, 30minute-1hour study = 1, 1hour-1.5hours = 1.5, etc).

Opportunities to participate in research will be announced in class, through UB Learns, and through email. Note, that just as you cannot turn in the same assignment and have it count for multiple classes, you cannot use research credits from other classes to earn extra credit in this class.

Students can receive the maximum 18 points of extra credit through the completion of any combination of Learner's Journals and Research Credit (e.g., 4 Learner's Journals and 2 research credits or 0 Learner's Journals and 6 research credits, etc.). Although this may not seem like much, please note that each exam is worth a total of 100 points. Earning all of the extra credit points that are available to you would bring a mid-range "C" on a single exam up to a low-range "A."

Grading Policy

Grades will be assigned in the following way:

A= 92-100	B-= 80-81	D+= 68-69
A-= 90-91	C+= 78-79	D= 60-67
B+= 88-89	C= 72-77	F= 0-59
B= 82-87	C-= 70-71	

However, I do reserve the right to adjust the scale if need be. This can only benefit you. That is to say that I will never institute a curve just for the sake of making the grades correspond to a normal distribution (a bell curve).

Course Objectives

Substantive Goals

- 1) Know the basic organization and function of American political institutions and understand the ways in which they have changed over the years
- 2) Relate the institutions and behavior analyzed in the course to core concepts and persistent problems in political science
- 3) Understand how parties, interest groups, public opinion, media, and campaigns influence the political process
- 4) Develop an understanding of political science as a discipline

Academic Integrity

Please consult the university's statement on academic integrity here:
<http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/integrity.shtml>

Expect severe sanctions if you commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Accommodations

“If you require classroom or testing accommodations due to a disability, please contact Accessibility Resources, located at 25 Capen Hall. AR can be reached by phone at (716) 645-2608 or by email at stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu. Please inform me as soon as possible about your needs so that we can coordinate your accommodations.”

Some More Ground Rules

Technology is great. In spite of the fact that my iPod is now a decade old, I actually love technology. However, technology in the classroom can also be distracting. In my experience laptops and other devices that can, in theory, be used to promote learning are more often used to surf the internet and cruise Facebook. Until they become a problem you are free to use laptops to take notes and pursue other class-related activities (e.g., the occasional Google search for course-relevant information). Much of the recent research on note-taking and information retention suggests that you will get far more out of class by taking notes on paper using a pen or pencil. I THEREFORE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO PUT THE LAPTOP AWAY DURING CLASS. Also, to the best of my knowledge, phones and iPods serve very little pedagogical purpose in a political science course. As such, I should not see or hear either such device in class. I'm not going to walk around the classroom confiscating such things (this isn't high school), but I will be liberal with my deductions from your grade if I see them in use during class.

A Final Caveat

This is a provisional battle plan for this course. There may be changes in the content or coverage of the material as the course unfolds. I will try to inform you of any such changes as far in advance as I can.

Week	Topic	Readings
1/26	Introduction/The Logic of American Politics	T: None Th: Chapter 1
2/2	The American Founding and the U.S. Constitution	T: Chapter 2 Th: Chapter 2 <i>Federalist</i> 10 and 51
2/9	The U.S. Constitution, Cont'd /Federalism	T: Chapter 2, Cont'd <i>Federalist</i> 39 Th: Chapter 3 <i>Federalist</i> 47 and 48
2/16	Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	T: Chapter 4 Bill of Rights

		Th: Chapter 4, Cont'd
2/23	Midterm #1 /Congress	T: None (Midterm #1) Th: Chapter 5 Article I, U.S. Constitution
3/2	Congress, Cont'd /The Executive	T: Chapter 5, Cont'd Th: Chapter 6 <i>Federalist</i> 70-72
3/9	The Executive, Cont'd /Bureaucracy	T: Chapter 6, Cont'd Article II, U.S. Constitution Th: Chapter 7
3/16	Spring Break (Woot!)	
3/23	The Judiciary	T: Chapter 8 <i>Federalist</i> 78 Th: Chapter 8, Cont'd Article III, U.S. Constitution
3/30	Midterm #2 /Political Parties	T: None (Midterm #2) Th: Chapter 12
4/6	Political Parties, Cont'd /Interest Groups	T: Chapter 12, Cont'd Th: Chapter 11
4/13	Interest Groups, Cont'd	T: Chapter 11, Cont'd Th: No Class (MPSA)
4/20	Public Opinion/ The Media and Political Communication	T: Chapter 9 Th: Chapter 14
4/27	Midterm #3 The Media and Political Communication, Cont'd	T: None (Midterm#3) Th: Chapter 14
5/4	Campaigns and Elections/ Political Participation	T: Chapter 13 Th: Chapter 10
5/11	FINAL EXAM	Th (5/14): 8:00AM-11:00AM