

PSCI 110-001: American Government

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Spring 2020
Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00-5:50 PM
Online due to COVID-19

Office hours: E-mail me to schedule a call/video chat.

1 Overview & goals

This course will teach you how to think *scientifically* and *systemically* about American politics. That means suspending value judgment, coming up with explanations for why things work the way they do, and testing those explanations against historical facts. I will make the case that American politics mostly involves conflict between two elite-led coalitions. Those coalitions have many moving parts, work within a complex set of institutions, and do what they do without always knowing it.

The first part of the course covers the origin and operation of our national institutions and party organizations. These can be viewed as a “wrapper” around big social forces. Over time, those forces cause change in the party coalitions, which play their roles within the wrapper. The second part of the course analyzes these social forces: public opinion, mass media, everyday voters, and social movements.

Written work is critical to your final grade. My essay assignments ask you to make connections among different course topics. This is to get you to develop a *systemic* understanding by working through issues at your own pace. The alternative is to have you cram for exams. Please read my rubric for essays closely (under the first class session below).

When this course is over, you will:

- Have better-than-basic knowledge of the American national political system,
- Be able to think about current events the way a political scientist might,
- And have gotten practice improving your writing.

2 Book you need to get

- Kollman, Ken. Any edition. *The American Political System*. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company. (Copies sell online for as low as \$1.99 plus shipping.)

3 Requirements

1. Midterm paper (35%) – A prompt is forthcoming. Due at 12 AM on Monday, May 11.
2. Creative project (25%) – A meme (static or video) or letter-to-the-editor on some topic of personal interest in politics. What do you know, having taken the course, that the general public might not? More instructions are forthcoming. Due at 12 AM on Wednesday, June 3, but please complete this as soon as your interest is piqued.
3. Final paper (40%) – This will ask you to specialize on some topic from before the midterm, then integrate it with what we learn in the second half of the course. Prompts are forthcoming. Due at 12 AM on Monday, June 8.

4 COVID-19 adjustments

Under normal circumstances, we would meet twice per week. You would do the reading before each meeting. I would use a lecture to explain key concepts and models. Then we would have open-ended discussion and time for clarifying questions. But circumstances are not normal, and not all students can “meet” online (e.g., due to technological limits, supervising children at home, et cetera). Here is how we will proceed:

1. We will share a chat room. Please join this chat room using a link I send out. This will be using the Discord platform. Discord is available for all standard smartphones, as a desktop computer program, and via the web at <https://discordapp.com>. This is similar to Slack, but it takes up less memory.¹
2. I will produce one short video (5-10 minutes) per scheduled lecture. This will cover the core concept(s) and/or model(s). I will upload these videos at the start of the respective week. **You may not redistribute these videos.** See the section below on “appropriate use of course materials.”
3. First, watch the video. Then do the reading.
4. From 4:00-5:50 PM on the day that class meets, I will host a live chat about that day’s subject matter. You are encouraged but not required to participate. Think of this as a Reddit AMA.²
5. The chat room will be available at all other times for whatever course-related questions you have. Feel free to use it for relevant, civil, and respectful discussion. Please do not use it to discuss private business (e.g., extensions, your grade on a paper).

¹<https://medium.com/ardentunited/why-we-use-discord-and-not-slack-500ac8027824>

²<https://www.lifewire.com/what-exactly-is-a-reddit-ama-3485985>

5 Advice on sending me e-mail

1. Use a subject line that indicates your need. Please don't reply to a blanket email sent through Blackboard, nor to a thread about some other issue.
2. Include the full course number (e.g., PSCI-110-001).
3. Be as specific as possible, and use complete sentences.
4. Keep all correspondence with respect to the same issue in the same thread. Start a different thread for a different issue.
5. Use your Drexel email so that I can search my inbox for your username.

6 No redistribution of course materials

The following language is provided by Drexel University:

It is important to recognize that some or all of the course materials provided to you may be the intellectual property of Drexel University, the course instructor, or others. Use of this intellectual property is governed by Drexel University policies, including the IT-1 policy found here: <https://drexel.edu/it/about/policies/policies/01-Acceptable-Use>

Briefly, this policy states that course materials, including recordings, provided by the course instructor may not be copied, reproduced, distributed or re-posted. Doing so may be considered a breach of this policy and will be investigated and addressed as possible academic dishonesty, among other potential violations. Improper use of such materials may also constitute a violation of the University's Code of Conduct found here: <https://drexel.edu/cpo/policies/cpo-1> and will be investigated as such.

7 Other policies

You agree to:

1. Treat guest speakers and classmates with respect.
2. Check Drexel email daily through the date of the final exam.
3. Attend class and meet course deadlines. Out-of-class written work loses five points for each 24-hour period past the time and date it is due.
4. Use Internet search or a dictionary to look up words you do not know.
5. Abide by all other Drexel policies, found at the following websites. Note that I reserve the right to use plagiarism-detection software.

- Academic integrity: http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic_dishonesty.asp
- Disability accommodation: <http://drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/students/>
- Add/Drop: <http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course-add-drop>
- Course withdrawal: <http://drexel.edu/provost/policies/course-withdrawal>

I agree to:

1. Abide by any grading guidelines in this syllabus and related instructions for assignments. Grading is on the 0-100 scale: 97 and up (A+), 93-96 (A), 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-87 (B), 80-82 (B-), and so on, down to 50 (F). Rounding occurs for final grades only, to the nearest whole number. The rounding threshold is 0.5 percentage points.
2. Answer student e-mail within 48 business hours. Business hours are 9 AM to 5:30 PM, Monday through Friday, non-holiday.
3. Except for the required books, post links to readings on Blackboard, if not the readings themselves.
4. Grade written work within 10 business days of submission.
5. Notify you of changes to this syllabus at least one week in advance of affected due dates.
6. Give office hours on a by-appointment basis. (See link above.) Students who are not in Philadelphia can book these times for phone conversations.

8 Schedule of classes

8.1 Housekeeping

April 7 Two items:

- This syllabus,
- “How to get an ‘A’ on a paper” (<https://bit.ly/2to6Bgd>),

8.2 Origin and working of the basic institutions

8.2.1 Constitution and federalism

April 9 Taylor, Steven L., Matthew S. Shugart, Arend Lijphart, and Bernard Grofman. 2014. “Political Engineering and the US Constitution.” In *A Different Democracy: American Government in a Thirty-One-Country Perspective*, 25-56. New Haven: Yale University Press.

April 14 “Federalism” in Kollman.

8.2.2 Political parties

April 16 Schwartz, Thomas. 1989. “Why Parties?” UCLA, Typescript. **Read pages 1-3, 12-17.**

April 21 “Political Parties” in Kollman.

8.2.3 Legislative, executive, and judicial branches in practice

April 23 Two items:

- “Congress” in Kollman.
- “Powell’s Amendments,” *Harvard Crimson*, May 20, 1964.
<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1963/5/20/powells-amendments-prep-adam-clayton-powells/>

April 28 “The Presidency” in Kollman.

April 30 “The Judiciary” in Kollman.

8.2.4 Midterm recap

May 5 Discussion of topics so far, plus midterm paper prompt.

8.3 Social forces in the evolution of American politics

8.3.1 Public opinion, the media, and ideology

May 7 “Public Opinion” in Kollman.

May 12 Ladd, Jonathan M. 2011. “Why Is Everyone Mad at the Mainstream Media?” and “The Institutional News Media in an Era of Political Polarization and Media Fragmentation.” In *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*, 1-9 and 66-101. Princeton: Princeton University Press. **All of first chapter; skim the second.**

May 14 Noel, Hans. 2013. “The Independent Development of Ideology.” In *Political Parties and Political Ideologies in America*, 67-92. New York: Cambridge University Press. **Skip pages 74-78.**

May 19 Mason, Lilliana. 2018. “Ideologues Without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82: 280-301.

8.3.2 Popular participation

May 21 “Political Participation” and “Elections and Campaigns” in Kollman.

May 28 “Interest Groups and Social Movements” in Kollman.

June 2 Miller, Gary and Norman Schofield. 2008. “The Transformation of the Republican and Democratic Party Coalitions in the U.S.” *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (3): 433-450.

8.3.3 Second-half recap

June 4 Course evaluation and discussion of final papers.