

PSCI 110-001: American Government

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Spring 2021

Monday and Wednesday, 4:00-5:50 PM
Remote (synchronous)

Office hours: <https://jacksantucci.as.me>

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. An online version is available immediately for roughly \$35: <https://digital.wwnorton.com/aps3core>.)

3 Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following components:

1. Syllabus-and-rubric quiz (5%) – ten questions, on Blackboard. Must be completed by 11:59 PM on Tuesday, March 30.
2. Class participation (15%) – Based mostly on attendance, but also quality of contributions to discussion. Try to do two things as you prepare for class: (1) find and understand the key distinction(s) in the readings, and (2) have some sense of how they relate to key distinctions from earlier classes.
3. First short paper (40%) – Asks you to watch and interpret a film in light of material from the first half of the course. Prompts forthcoming. Due on Friday, April 30 at 11:59 PM (Eastern), via Turnitin on Blackboard.
4. Second short paper (40%) – Asks you to reflect on current events based on material from both halves of the course. Prompts forthcoming. Due on Wednesday, June 9 at 11:59 PM (Eastern), via Turnitin on Blackboard.

Note that I do not offer so-called “extra credit.” Please see the midterm- and final-essay prompts as soon as possible, so that you can begin planning your answers.

4 E-mail policy

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 (i.e., 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.

5 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.

6 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: <https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity>
 - Disability accommodation: <https://drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/students>
 - Add/Drop: <http://www.drexel.edu/provost/policies/course-add-drop>
 - Course withdrawal: <https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/course-withdrawal>
 - Incomplete grades: https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/incomplete_grades
 - Grade appeals: <https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/grade-appeals>

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 any 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.

7 Schedule of classes

7.1 Housekeeping

March 29 Two items:

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

7.2 Origin and working of the basic institutions

7.2.1 Constitution and federalism

March 31 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 5 “Federalism” in Kollman.

7.2.2 Political parties and voting rights

April 7 Schwartz, Thomas. 1989. “Why Parties?” UCLA, Typescript. **Read pages 1-3, 12-17.**

April 12 “Political Parties” in Kollman.

April 14 Valelly, Richard. 2016. “How Suffrage Politics Made – and Makes – America.” In Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert C. Lieberman, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

7.2.3 Legislative, executive, and judicial branches in practice

April 19 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 21 “The Presidency” in Kollman.

April 26 In-class film (*All The Way*, 2016, HBO).

April 28 Finish film and discuss.

May 3 “The Judiciary” in Kollman.

7.3 Social forces in the evolution of American politics

7.3.1 Public opinion, the media, and ideology

May 5 “Public Opinion” in Kollman.

May 10 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 12 Noel, Hans. 2014. “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 17 Mason, Lilliana. 2018. “Ideologues Without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82: 280-301.

7.3.2 Popular participation

May 19 “Political Participation” and “Elections and Campaigns” in Kollman.

May 24 “Interest Groups and Social Movements” in Kollman.

May 26 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.

June 5 Course evaluation and discussion of final papers.