

PSCI 110-001: American Government

Prof. Jack Santucci
Drexel University
jas948@drexel.edu

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Monday and Wednesday, 4:00-5:50 PM
One Drexel Plaza, GL45

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

1 Overview & goals

This course will teach you how to think scientifically about American politics. We are in a period of rapid and unsettling change, and I want to help you understand it. That means suspending value judgment, coming up with systematic 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. It is up to you to decide if I am right. I am open to “yes” or “no” answers, as long as you defend your position with reasoned reference to course material.

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 do their work within the wrapper. The second part of the course analyzes these social forces: public opinion, the mass media, everyday voters, and their roles throughout history. When this course is over, you will:

- Have a better sense of how we got to the way things are today;
- Be able to analyze 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

Your grade will be based on the following components:

1. Attendance and participation (10%) – Write your full name and one question/comment about the day's reading(s) on a small piece of paper. Drop this into the coffee can, which I will circulate at the beginning of each class. What you write down must reflect the fact that you have done the reading. The coffee can is meant to make you read and integrate material throughout the quarter.
2. Midterm exam (30%) – Short-answer, multiple-choice, and closed-book. In class on February 5.
3. First short paper (30%) – Based on our viewing of the movie *All the Way*. Due by start of class on February 17.
4. Second short paper (30%) – Asks you to specialize on some topic from before the midterm, then integrate it with what we learn in the second half of the course. Due at midnight on March 16.

4 How to get what you want efficiently by 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.

5 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.

6 Schedule of classes

6.1 Housekeeping

January 6 Two items:

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

6.2 Origin and working of the basic institutions

6.2.1 Constitution and federalism

January 8 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.

January 13 “Federalism” in Kollman.

6.2.2 Political parties

January 15 Schwartz, Thomas. 1989. “Why Parties?” UCLA, Typescript. **Read pages 1-3, 12-17.**

January 22 “Political Parties” in Kollman.

6.2.3 Legislative, executive, and judicial branches in practice

January 27 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/>

January 29 “The Presidency” in Kollman.

February 3 “The Judiciary” in Kollman.

6.2.4 Midterm exam

February 5 Midterm exam in class.

6.2.5 Historical application: Into the modern era

February 10 and 12 *All the Way*. Film. United States: HBO, 2016. **Watch in class.**

6.3 Social forces in the evolution of American politics

6.3.1 Public opinion, the media, and ideology

February 17 “Public Opinion” in Kollman.

February 19 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.**

February 24 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.**

February 26 Mason, Lilliana. 2018. “Ideologues Without Issues: The Polarizing Consequences of Ideological Identities.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82: 280-301.

6.3.2 Popular participation

March 2 “Political Participation” and “Elections and Campaigns” in Kollman.

March 4 “Interest Groups and Social Movements” in Kollman.

March 9 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.

March 11 Course evaluation and discussion of final papers.