

PLS 100:
Intro to American Politics
Fall 2017 – Lecture Mon/Wed, 10:20AM-11:40AM
Location: 108 Ernst Bessey Hall

Professor:

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Course Purpose & Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the rules and institutions that govern political action in the United States. In particular, we will examine how the historical evolution of American political institutions affects contemporary debates. Adopting both historical and social scientific lenses, we will study political action – both of (un)elected officials and of the American citizenry – in a systematic and empirical manner.

There are three primary goals for this class. The first is to introduce the basic ideas and concepts that define American democracy to understand how government “works.” We will learn how institutions were initially developed and have subsequently constrained and shaped political action throughout the history of the United States. That is, we seek to develop a deep contextual knowledge of how political actors function within the governmental structure, of the role the American public plays in a representative government, and why political actors (legislators, bureaucrats, presidents, parties, etc.) behave the way they do.

The second goal of the course is to situate contemporary political issues within a historical framework. Beyond understanding the basic function of American political institutions, you will learn to think critically about the ongoing debates within society. For example, we will consider how battles over gay rights, affirmative action, gun control, and financial regulation influence representation and shape national public policy.

Finally, this course aims to introduce you to the scientific study of politics. You will begin to sharpen your ability to read and digest academic work, using these skills to identify puzzles within American politics, with an opportunity to demonstrate this knowledge on course examinations. You will also cultivate your writing skills through two short reflection/analysis papers.

Required Texts

1. Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2017. *The Logic of American Politics*, 8th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781506358666. [Note: Hereafter referred to as KJKV in the syllabus.]

- You may purchase the 6th or 7th edition since the essential information remains the same (the examples, however, will be outdated)
- You may elect to purchase the hard copy at the bookstore or from online booksellers such as Amazon.com
- An electronic *only* option of the newer/8th edition is available for rent from VitalSource for \$53.00 (<https://www.vitalsource.com/products/the-logic-of-american-politics-samuel-kernel-1-v9781506358642>)

2. Supplemental Readings for Critique and Discussion

- While the textbook is essential for your understanding of course concepts, these additional texts enhance the learning experience as primary/historical sources; not all readings will be discussed in class, but I encourage you to at least skim these materials each week
- Many of these will be from online archives, as noted on the Course Schedule, and the links to these sources will be available in the “Supplemental Readings” folder on D2L
- Excerpts from books or articles not freely available online will be also be posted in the “Supplemental Readings” folder on D2L

3. You are also **required** to read a national newspaper on a daily basis (e.g., NY Times, LA Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor). Most major news outlets have discounted student rates (e.g., the NYT online (nytimes.com/collegerate)). The library, too, provides free access to many national newspapers through different electronic databases (e.g., LexisNexis or Factiva). Occasionally, specific current events articles will be assigned and incorporated into class discussion.

Assignments and Grading

Your final course grade will be a function of the following components (additional details are provided below):

<i>Item</i>	<i>AssignmentPoints</i>	<i>GradePercentage</i>
Exam #1	100	20%
Exam #2	100	20%
Exam #3	100	20%
Current Events Analyses	150 (75pt./ea.)	30%
Participation	50	10%
TOTAL	500	100%

Grades will be assigned using the following scale: 4.0 (90.0-100%), 3.5 (86.5-89.9%), 3.0 (80.0-86.4%), 2.5 (76.5-79.9%), 2.0 (70.0-76.4%), 1.5 (66.5-69.9%), 1.0 (60.0-66.4%), and 0.0 (59.9% or lower).

Exams

There will be three in-class exams, which will be worth a combined total of 60% of your grade. The exams will consist of multiple choice questions and true/false questions. The nature of the course is that it is intrinsically cumulative, though the material for each exam will be drawn heavily from the assigned readings and lecture material that immediately precedes it. That is to say that Exam #1 will cover material from the first third of the course, Exam #2 will primarily contain material drawn from the second third, and Exam #3 covers the final third (i.e., although you may need to know how Congress “works” to explain voting behavior on the final exam, the exams are not explicitly cumulative).

The exam will include *factual* knowledge you’ve acquired for that section, focusing on the mechanics of how different processes work, and will require you to bridge *big ideas and concepts* presented in the class. To help you prepare for the exams, each lecture contains two study/review slides identifying key concepts and review questions. To ensure that you’re learning the material, I encourage you to utilize the online textbook resources found here: <https://edge.sagepub.com/kernell8e>. For each chapter in the textbook, you will find study questions, flashcards, and quizzes to help you stay on track.

You are required to take all exams at the scheduled times. Make-up exams will be offered only in the most exceptional circumstances such as being hospitalized due to illness, death of a family member, religious observance, or official university activities that create a schedule conflict. If you wish to reschedule a test, you must contact the professor before the regularly scheduled exam to discuss the make-up option and receive permission to reschedule. Excuses provided after the regularly scheduled exam will not be accepted unless serious circumstances - such as hospitalization - prevented prompt notification. The format of the make-up exam may, at my discretion, differ from the in-class exam format.

Current Events Analysis and Reflection

To connect the course materials to the real world, you are expected to consistently read a national newspaper. Twice this semester, I will select an article (or a combination of articles) from a news media source and you will submit a brief (3-4 page, 12 pt. font, double-spaced) paper that critically evaluates that article as it relates to what we've been studying in class. The article and question prompts will be provided at least 10 days prior to the deadline listed in the Course Schedule below.

Each analysis is worth 75 points, for a combined total of 150 points or 30%, of your final grade. You must upload a polished paper to the dropbox on D2L by 5:00PM on the dates on the Course Schedule. **Again, your papers should be double-spaced, using 12-point font. Please include your name, the course number, and the date in the upper righthand corner.** Late papers will be accepted only with excused absences, discussed ahead of time with the professor.

Attendance & Participation

A critical component of this course derives from your active participation in class, your reading, your thinking, and yourself. If you miss a class for any reason, it is not necessary to tell me. However, there are costs to missing class. The lectures contain information not found in the readings and you are responsible for all lecture information. Because exams are drawn from readings and lectures, if you miss class, it is in your best interest to borrow notes from a classmate. To encourage participation in class, there will be daily participation exercises using Top Hat; instructions to register for an account for this class will be sent in a separate email. The questions and activities are designed to help you engage with the material, to prepare you for exams, and to bolster your grade. They'll be graded on a pass/fail basis; if you are in class and you participate in ALL activities/questions for the day, you will get credit. If you're absent or fail to participate, you won't. *You are allowed to miss 3 classes without penalty this semester.* You should save these misses for travel plans, sports activities, illnesses, and other unforeseen circumstances. That is, use your absences when you actually need to use them. *The fourth time you miss class, your attendance and participation grade will be docked 10 points. The fifth and sixth time you miss class, your grade will be docked by 20 points.* If you miss more than six classes, you must meet with the professor and will be subject to failure. The participation component of the course makes up the final 50 points, or 10%, of your course grade.

Academic Honesty

Article 2.III.B.2 of the Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the Department of Political Science adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.)

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including writing assignments, quizzes, and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the Academic Integrity: <https://msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>.)

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

Other Course Policies

Assigned Readings

Readings are typically assigned on a weekly basis (or cover two lecture periods) and should be completed *before* the start of the first class for each topic. This ensures that you will more fully understand the lecture topics. There are many subjects in the text that I will not cover in class, but you will need to know for exams. There are also topics that I will elaborate on in greater detail on the assumption that you already have a foundational understanding of the concept or subject.

Desire2Learn (D2L) and Email

The course’s D2L site will contain vital information for the semester: lecture slides and details on assignments, supplemental readings, and updated material (e.g., the syllabus) if there are any changes to the schedule. I will occasionally send announcements to the class via email. You are automatically subscribed to the class list, but it is your responsibility to check your MSU email account on a daily basis. Email is also the best way to communicate with your instructor outside of class. Please use **PLS 100** as the subject line of all emails ensure yours does not get lost.

Grading

Except in unusual circumstances, you should expect your work to be graded and returned to you within a week of submission. We are committed to grading work objectively and fairly. If you have questions or concerns about your exam scores and assignment grades, you must first see one of the teaching assistants, who are the primary graders for the course. All requests for a re-grade must be made to the TA – with a detailed written justification illustrating what you think the grader missed – within one week that the assignment was returned to the class. Note that requests to re-grade an exam or assignment may result in a lower score than originally awarded. After discussing the grade in question with the TA, if you wish further reexamination of your grade, you may bring all documentation to the professor.

Civility and Respect

By its very nature, political science courses often deal with subjects that are controversial. Throughout this class, we will grapple with questions that arise in American politics and engage in discussion about these issues; that is an essential part of becoming an informed citizen. You are encouraged to think critically about these topics, to evaluate your own belief system, and to voice your own opinion, especially in written assignments. However, we must all be aware that other students may hold other opinions. It is class policy that we respect each person, whether we agree or not.

Course Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
9/6	Course Introduction	None
9/11	Political Foundations	(1) KJKV ch. 2 (2) The Declaration of Independence (KJKV Appendix 2)
9/13 9/18	Crafting the Constitution	(1) Articles of Confederation (KJKV Appendix 1) (2) The Constitution (KJKV Appendix 3) (3) <i>Federalist</i> No. 10 (KJKV Appendix 4) (4) <i>Federalist</i> No. 51 (KJKV Appendix 5) (5) George Mason's (1787) <i>Objections to the Constitution</i>
9/20	Federalism	(1) KJKV ch. 3 (2) <i>Brutus</i> Essay No. 2 (3) <i>Brutus</i> Essay No. 5
9/25 9/27	Civil Liberties	(1) KJKV ch. 5 (2) Madison's <i>Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments</i> (3) Excerpt from <i>Roe v. Wade</i> (1973) (4) Rosenberg's (1995) <i>The Real World of Constitutional Rights</i>
10/2	Catch-up & Review	No new readings
10/4	In-Class Exam #1	
10/9 10/11	Civil Rights	(1) KJKV ch. 4 (2) MLK's (1963) <i>Letter from a Birmingham Jail</i>
10/16 10/18	Congress	(1) KJKV ch. 6 (2) Burke's (1774) <i>Letter to the Electors of Bristol</i>
10/23 10/25	The Presidency	(1) KJKV ch. 7 (2) Washington's Farewell Address (1796) (3) FDR's Inaugural Address (1933) (4) "Going the Distance: On and Off the Road with Barack Obama" (Remnick 2014)
10/30 11/1	The Judiciary	(1) KJKV ch. 9 (2) <i>Federalist</i> No. 78
11/6 11/8	Catch-up & Review	No new readings
	In-Class Exam #2	
11/10	Current Events Analysis #1 Due	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Readings</i>
11/13 11/15	Political Parties	(1) KJKV ch. 12 (2) “Political Polarization in the American Public” (Pew 2014)
11/20 11/22	Public Opinion	(1) KJKV ch. 10 (2) Jefferson’s Letter to Colonel Carrington (1787) (3) <i>Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed</i> (Squire 1988) (4) “Fight the Temptation to Pay Attention to Polls” (Nyhan 2015)
11/27	Voting, Campaigns & Elections	(1) KJKV ch. 11 (2) Debates at the Constitutional Convention. Read the May 31, June 6, and June 25 debates (3) “The Big Tilt” (Schlozman 2001)
11/29	Interest Groups	(1) KJKV ch. 13 (2) <i>Federalist</i> No. 10 (KJKV Appendix 4)
12/4	The News Media	KJKV ch. 14
12/6	Catch-up & Review	No new readings
12/8	Current Events Analysis #2 Due	
12/15	Exam #3 – Note Time: 7:45am-9:45am	

*While I anticipate the course schedule is fixed for the semester, depending on the pace of the class, the syllabus is subject to change. If changes are instituted, you will be promptly informed via a clear announcement on the course’s D2L site.