

Introduction to American Politics
Political Science 101
Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Swigger
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Introduction

The United States of America is founded on the idea of rule by the people. As we shall see, however, the majority of Americans know disturbingly little about what their government is, what it does, how it is structured and how it functions. The goal of this course is to provide an introduction to American politics. By the end of the course you should all have a basic understanding of the theory and practice of American political institutions (how a bill becomes a law, the purpose of a Congressional sub-committee, the duties and powers of the president, etc.) This course is about more than the basics, however. Political science is not a recitation of rules and regulations, nor is it political history. There is a fundamental difference between politics (the public discourse of issues and policy relevant to the public good) and political science (the study of causation in the political world). Political science, as a discipline, is devoted to answering how and why the world is the way that it is. Though we are a social science, with all of the quirks and caveats that come with studying the social world, we are still a science. This means that we answer questions by forming theories and hypotheses, and collect data to test those hypotheses. As we go along in this course, you will be exposed to not only the basic rules and regulations; I will also attempt to give you a taste of the scientific side. If you want to change the world, you must first understand what it is and how it works. The only way to achieve a real measure of understanding is by analyzing the evidence. Beliefs and opinions are useful in their place, *but reality is not defined by your beliefs.*

GEC goals and expected learning outcomes:

Goals:

This course fulfills the GEC requirement that students learn about the breadth of the social world. Students learn about the systematic study of human behavior and cognition; of the structure of human societies, cultures, and institutions; and of the processes by which individuals, groups, and societies interact, communicate, and use human, natural, and economic resources.

Expected learning outcomes:

1. Students understand the theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they are applied to the studies of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.
2. Students understand the behavior of individuals, differences and similarities in the contexts of human existence (e.g., psychological, social, cultural, economic, geographic, and political), and the processes by which groups, organizations, and societies function.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

(1) Individuals and Groups Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students understand the theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they are applied to the study of individuals and groups.
2. Students understand the behavior of individuals, differences and similarities in social and cultural contexts of human existence, and the processes by which groups function.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and group values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

(2) Organizations and Politics Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students understand the theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they are applied to the study of organizations and politics.
2. Students understand the formation and durability of political, economic, and social organizing principles and their differences and similarities across contexts.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess the nature and values of organizations and politics and their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

Grades

Participation & Quizzes	10%
Homework	15%
Exam 1	35%
Exam 2	40%

-To ensure that you do not fall behind on your reading, I will give you 1 or 2 quizzes per week. These quizzes will come at the beginning of class. Those who come to class late will not be given a chance to take that day's quiz.

-There are two homework assignments spread throughout the quarter. These should be 1-2 pages, single-spaced. I will not accept homework longer than 2 pages. In each assignment you will be asked to apply critical thinking skills to a political problem, or to critique a work of political science. There is a 20% per day penalty for all late papers. Please be ready to turn in your homework on time on the due date. You can turn in homework assignments in the dropbox on the class' Carmen website.

-Both the midterm and final will consist of multiple-choice and short answer questions.

Required Text

Kernell, Jacobson and Kausser. *The Logic of American Politics* – in the daily schedule the textbook will be referred to as “Kernell” and there will be a chapter listed.

Additional text: George Orwell's *1984*, which should be available in the campus bookstore, online booksellers such as Amazon.com, or any other bookstore or library located in the western hemisphere.

Additional required course readings are available electronically. They can be reached through the course website on CARMEN, which you should all have access to. Lecture slides from previous classes can also be found on the course website, though there may be some delay before these become available.

Tentative Schedule

September 22: Introduction to the course and The Prisoner's Dilemma

September 27: US Constitution

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 2

September 29: What does government have to do with your life?

Reading Assignment: Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. "Reconstituting the submerged state: The challenges of social policy reform in the Obama Era." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(3): 803-824.

October 4: Federalism

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 3

October 6: Totalitarianism and the state and support for civil liberties

Reading Assignment: 1984

See also: Kernell, Chapter 5

October 11: Public opinion and polling

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 10

October 13: Civil rights, race and political realignment

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 4

October 18: Civil rights, tolerance, and racism in the American public

HOMEWORK #1 DUE!

October 20: **Exam 1!!**

October 25: Electoral systems

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 11

October 27: Parties and partisanship

November 1: Congress I

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 6

November 3: Congress II

Reading Assignment: Chapter 1 of Mayhew, *The Electoral Connection*

November 8: The Presidency

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 7

November 10: Politics and news coverage

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 14

November 15: Bureaucracy

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 8

November 17: Judiciary

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 9

HOMEWORK #2 DUE!

November 22: Interest groups and the politics of collective action

Reading Assignment: Olson, Chapter 2 from *The Logic of Collective Action*

November 29: Public policy and the prospects for reform

Reading Assignment: Kernell, Chapter 15

December 1: **EXAM 2!!**