

PSCI 1101: The American Political System

Spring 2009

University of Colorado

Department of Political Science

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logic.cqpress.com

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the study of American Politics from the perspective of a Political Scientist. We will undertake an in-depth examination of some of the critical topics in American politics, such as the foundations of government, its rules and institutions (Congress, the courts, etc.), and variations in behavior of different actors in the political process. I will try to emphasize differing perspectives on why government acts the way it does, why political actors (elected officials, bureaucrats, voters, interest groups, etc.) behave the way they do, and why policies are the way they are. An underlying theme to the course draws on an important set of interrelated theoretical concepts of contemporary Political Science: that actors are rational and strategic, and that structures and outcomes in politics are often a result of the need for many individuals to act collectively. Lectures will often be structured around current debates in American politics (e.g. presidential power, partisan polarization, etc.). While the subject of each lecture will be related to the day's readings, they will not necessarily cover the exact same material. I will try to provide as much opportunity as possible for discussion and your comments. Thus, I expect that all students will be active participants in their own education.

While I feel it is important to emphasize an analytical approach to the study of politics, I also try to focus on the important political issues of the day. This means that all students must keep informed of political events occurring throughout the semester.

At the end of the course students should not only understand much about the institutions and actors that constitute the political process in the United States, but should also have some of the basic intellectual tools necessary to do more advanced study in political science and other social science fields.

Updates to the syllabus, lecture slides, grades, and other course-related information will be posted on the website (CULearn). Supplementary material to the textbook (chapter summaries, review questions, etc.) are available at the textbook website (logic.cqpress.com).

Like many courses in American politics, we tackle subjects that are sometimes viewed as controversial. It is imperative that everyone (instructors and students alike) strives to maintain an environment that is conducive to learning. We should always remember that people bring differences with them into the classroom and that these differences should be respected. Thus, I ask that each of us maintain civility when asking questions and making comments. Likewise, questions and comments by others should be treated with civility at all times.

TEXTS

Reading will come from a textbook and a reader. Please purchase the following books. All the readings assigned in the syllabus are required.

- Kernell, Jacobson, and Kousser, The Logic of American Politics, 4th Edition (referred to as **KJK**)
- Kernell and Smith, eds., Principles and Practice of American Politics, 3rd Edition (referred to as **KS**)

To keep current with important political events I require daily reading of a major national newspaper. This can be done through reading of hardcopy papers such as *The New York Times* (there will be opportunity to order reduced price subscriptions) or on-line versions of papers like *The New York Times* or the *Washington Post*.

Course Requirements

- Readings: The readings for this class are fairly sizable and complicated. You must give yourself ample time to digest everything in the readings sufficiently. All of the readings listed in the syllabus are required and should be completed before the first day that we start to discuss this material in class. I will occasionally send out articles (or links to articles) on current events or other related material to help connect what we are learning with what is occurring in out in the world.

A good way to ensure that you have sufficiently read and understood the literature is to take notes as you read through each piece (as opposed to highlighting). I find it best to write notes in the margins of books/articles right next to important ideas. Once you've completed a chapter or section of a chapter in the textbook, put it aside and see if you can write a paragraph on the major points of emphasis in what you've just read. Test yourself to see if you recall and can define important terms. In addition, I recommend that students also utilize the practice questions, quizzes, etc. on the textbook website.

If you have questions pertaining to material in the readings, previous lectures, or any other relevant subject you may: (1) e-mail them to me or your T.A. and we will try to answer them in class or through e-mail, (2) present them in your recitation section, or (3) visit me or your T.A. in our office hours. Exams will cover material presented in lecture, in your recitation section, and in the readings.

- Lecture and Participation: This course relies on lectures and recitation. Attendance to both is mandatory. Lectures are an opportunity for me to explain and elaborate on the readings and for you to comment and contribute. While lectures will generally parallel reading materials, they will not simply repeat the readings. Recitation sections will be devoted specifically to material in the readings for that week. You will have a separate syllabus for your recitation section. I expect all students to participate in recitation discussion, which will not be possible without having done the reading.
- The Classroom Environment: Tardiness, early departures, ringing phones, etc. detract from

the learning environment. Therefore, I ask that students arrive on time and remain in class for the duration of the period. Please turn off cell phones, beepers, and other electronic devices when you enter the classroom. In addition, use of a computer for note-taking is certainly encouraged. However, web surfing, text-messaging, emailing, etc. not only reduces your engagement and comprehension of the material during class, but is highly distracting for the students around you. Please do not participate in these activities during class.

Finally, since this class emphasizes student participation, it is critical that you keep current on the reading, attend class, and contribute daily. You need to be an active participant in your own education.

ASSIGNMENTS

Graded material will consist of three exams, unannounced quizzes in recitation, a 5-page paper assignment, and a participation grade. You must complete all the exams and the paper in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

Exams: Exams will cover the material in the readings and in lecture. They will be non-cumulative and will consist of multiple choice and very short answer questions (usually 1-2 sentences). There will be no review sheet for the exams, but we will hold review sessions prior to each exam as an opportunity for you to ask questions on material you do not understand. If you foresee that you will be unable to attend the scheduled exams, please drop this course – make-up exams will only be possible under extenuating circumstances, will be entirely essay exams, and will be offered in the last hour of the schedule final exam time.

Recitation: The recitation grade will be a compilation of your participation and quiz performance. Participation is a reflection of each student's attendance and daily contributions to the discussion of the reading material. A number of quizzes will occur in your recitation section on unspecified days. The quizzes will cover material for that week's readings. Quizzes are an opportunity for you to gauge your knowledge of the course content.

Research Paper: All students are required to write a 5-page research paper. The subject of this paper and details concerning how the paper is to be written will be offered in the next few weeks. Due date: April 14.

Grade Distribution

First midterm exam	15%
Second midterm exam	20%
Recitation grade	20%
Research paper	20%
Final exam	25%

No matter how careful, instructors sometimes make mistakes in grading. I will be happy to regrade any exam or paper. I ask, however, that you hold on to any item for at least 24 hours after it is returned to you before asking for a regrade. Any request for a regrade must be made in writing and within one week from the item being returned to you, after which no regrading will

be done. Ordinarily, the entire exam or assignment will be regraded, which means that the grade may go up, go down, or stay the same.

Be aware that cheating or plagiarism, of any sort, will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the class and appropriate action by the college. I strongly encourage you to review the University's policies with respect to academic integrity. In sum, the University position is that its reputation depends on maintaining the highest standards of intellectual honesty. Commitment to those standards is the responsibility of every student, faculty, and staff member on this campus. Cheating is defined as using unauthorized materials or receiving unauthorized assistance during an examination or other academic exercise. Plagiarism is defined as the use of another's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to, the following: failing to use quotation marks when directly quoting from a source; failing to document distinctive ideas from a source; fabricating or inventing sources; and copying information from computer-based sources, i.e., the Internet.

University Policies

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Willard 322, and <http://www.Colorado.EDU/disabilityservices>.

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment, the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships apply to all students, staff and faculty. Any student who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://www.colorado.edu/odh>.

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html>

- Jan. 13 **Course introduction.**
- KJK, Preface & Note to Students
- Jan. 15 & 20 **Logic in American Politics?**
- KJK, Chapter 1
 - KS, 1-1 & 1-2
- Jan. 22 **The Constitution and its motivations.**
- *The Constitution* (KJK Appendix)
 - KJK, Chapter 2
- Jan. 27 & 29 **State-rights versus federal supremacy.**
- KJK, Chapter 3
 - KS, 3-2
- Feb. 3 & 5 **What difference do rules make? A look at congressional organization.**
- KJK, Chapter 6
 - KS, 6-3
- Feb. 10 **Representation: What does a Representative do?**
- KS, 6-2 & 10-2
- Feb. 12 ****** FIRST MIDTERM EXAMINATION ******
- Feb. 17 & 19 **Presidents, Power and Policy.**
- KJK, Chapter 7
 - KS, 7-1
- Feb. 24 & 26 **Bureaucracy as Agent.**
- KJK, Chapter 8
 - KS, 8-2
- Mar. 3 & 5 **Composing courts as policy makers?**
- KJK, Chapter 9
 - KS, 9-4

Mar. 10 & 12 **What's the point of parties?**

- KJK, Chapter 12
- KS, 12-1

Mar. 17 **Party polarization: Is it all that bad?**

- KS, 10-4 & 11-2

Mar. 19 ****** SECOND MIDTERM EXAMINATION ******

Mar. 31 **Do elections and voting matter? I**

- KJK, Chapter 11 (except pp. 536-551)

Apr. 2 **Film: TBA**

Apr. 7 **Do elections and voting matter? II**

- KS, 12-2

Apr. 9 **What factors influence political participation?**

- KS, 11-1

Apr. 14 **Interest Groups: Their difficulties and role in a democracy.**

- KJK, Chapter 13 (except pp. 637-43)
- KS, 13-2

Research Paper Due

Apr. 16 **The ins and outs of campaign finance.**

- KJK, Chapter 13, pp. 637-43
- KJK, Chapter 11, pp. 536-551

Apr. 21 **Should lawmakers listen to public opinion?**

- KJK, Chapter 10

Apr. 23 **The Media: Informer or Agenda-setter?**

- KJK, Chapter 14

Apr. 28 **Institutional Reform: Can we fix what's broke?**

- KJK, Chapter 15

Apr. 30 **Extra class (Review?)**

****** FINAL EXAMINATION: Saturday, May 2, 4:30pm ******