

Political Science 101 (POL 101): American Government and Politics

Summer 2020, Purdue University

Graduate Instructor: Alexander Pijanowski

Beering Hall 2231, apijanow@purdue.edu

Office Hours: M 9:30 am-11:30 am;

T/Th 3-5 pm; or by appointment (on Zoom, Skype, or Webex)

Course Description:

My guiding goal in this course is to introduce students to foundational arguments relating to the design and operation of American political institutions. A large share of the course establishes these core ideas and inquires how they have changed because of significant events, technological innovations, and changing attitudes. The assessments are designed to evaluate each student's progress during the course in learning basic concepts of American politics and their applications.

That being said, I have some other learning objectives, which include: to introduce students to the characteristic methods which political scientists use to analyze the political world, to optimize students' ability to search for evidence and weigh its quality, and to facilitate the high level of political awareness we often associate with good citizenship. I also hope to instill research, writing, and information literacy skills in demand in other academic and professional settings. The writing assignments and a number of other activities, such as discussion post requirements and reading comprehension quizzes, are designed with these capabilities in mind.

I envision everyone learning a good deal of helpful information about our national political history and institutions, and I expect that we will even have some fun along the way. Thank you for joining me in this course, and I look forward to working through this material together.

Required Course Materials:

- Barbara A. Bardes, Mack C. Shelley, and Steffen W. Schmidt, *American Government and Politics Today: The Essentials, Enhanced*, 19th Ed., ISBN-13 978-1337799782. There is a digital (eTextbook) version available at a reduced cost through Amazon. [hereafter referred to as "BSS"]
- Assorted book chapters, articles, and video/audio sources (i.e. YouTube clips, podcasts), which I will make available to you on the course's Brightspace page.

Assignment Descriptions:

8 Weekly Reading Quizzes (40% of grade):

To help guide their understanding of reading assignments, students will complete 10 short reading comprehension quizzes in Brightspace. The first of these quizzes is a “Syllabus Quiz” to help me determine whether there are any substantial misunderstandings about the course material or timeline. These quizzes ask three or four very brief questions on the main ideas of that day’s reading, graded exclusively on a completion basis (5 points per reading quiz). These exercises will be due by 11:59 p.m., with a two-point deduction for any reading quiz submitted late.

4 Written Assignments (20% of grade):

The minimum length for each is 250 words, and the maximum is 1000 words. Please submit these files as either .doc or .pdf files.

Writing Assignment #1, “Federalist Papers Translation” (5%):

Personal writing styles and general use of language have changed a lot since the *Federalist Papers* were written, so readers today may struggle to read them. I also realize that on an international campus like ours, English may be a second language for many students. This assignment asks that you “translate” a paragraph of your choice from *Federalist* Essay No. 10 OR No. 51 by rewriting that paragraph in a style that could be easily understood by a classmate.

Due May 23, 11:59 p.m.

Writing Assignment #2, “Normative and Empirical Claims” (5%):

Anyone who wants to study politics scientifically should learn to tell between normative claims (how the world “should be”) and empirical/descriptive claims (how the world “is”) apart. I uploaded six editorials to the class website. Please identify 2 normative and 2 empirical claims in an article of your choice, and describe why you labeled a claim one or the other.

Due May 27, 11:59 p.m.

Writing Assignment #3: “Elected Official Research” (5%):

A central idea in Madisonian democratic thought is that elected officials are accountable to the citizens they represent. If you care strongly about some specific political issue (i.e. free speech rights, tax policy), you should be able to find out what stance your elected leaders take on the issue. For this assignment, visit the official website of your home district’s U.S. Senator or Representative. (If you live outside the U.S., you may study one of West Lafayette’s U.S. congresspeople). Afterward, report on 1) your chosen official’s position on your “favorite” issue, and 2) how easy or difficult it was to find this information.

Due June 5, 11:59 p.m.

Writing Assignment #4, “Fact-Checking Exercise” (5%):

The ability to find information and classify its quality contributes to your information literacy and democratic citizenship skills. Return to the elected official you studied for *Writing Assignment #3*. Using online sources like news sites and social media, find three **empirical** claims from this person. ***It is essential that these claims could be proven wrong using factual evidence.*** Using two or more outside sources, give each claim a “letter grade” for truthfulness. **Due June 10, 11:59 p.m.**

6 Short Reflection Posts (10% of grade):

Each student must post on the class discussion board at least six times during the Maymester. ***For full credit on each of your reflection posts, engage with at least one other student post.*** I will upload guidelines to the course page with specific expectations for discussion posts.

1 Take-Home Midterm (20% of grade):

Following Unit II, I will make five short-answer questions on key topics available on the course Brightspace page. These questions will be broad, meaning there are multiple “right” answers, but I expect well-organized and thoughtful answers. The exam is “timed” (due 48 hours after I make it available), but you may refer to the textbook, readings, and your notes. Each response should be about half a page (double-spaced) in length.

1 Final Paper (10% of grade):

A key skill in political science is the ability to thoughtfully compare previous and new knowledge. I would like you to write a short (at least 500 words) reflective paper on a class topic you found most interesting. Pick one of the twelve weekly topics listed on the syllabus (i.e. “Campaign Politics,” “Congress”). Briefly describe your prior awareness of the subject, based on previous classes, your own reading, or conversations with friends or family. Then, tell me *at least TWO* new things you learned. Have you changed your views on this topic at all? What are you especially excited to learn about on the topic, either on your own or in future classes?

Extra Credit Opportunity (5 extra points):

For five bonus points added to your overall points total, complete **ONE** of the following:

- Visit the Ballotpedia page for a Congressperson in your state who has served *at least* 3 terms. Describe whether you think the “incumbency advantage” applies here. Does this person win by a larger margin each time they run for re-election? If not, suggest some reasons this person failed to cash in on the expected “boost” from being in office.
- Select an episode from the “Wicked Game” podcast we did not cover. After listening to that episode, write a brief essay (about one page) describing your reaction to the election in question, comparing it to others covered in class. You may also compare a “Wicked Game” episode to your personal recollections of more recent contests.

Course Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, you can expect to have developed the following skills:

1. Identify key ideas and themes in American political history, such as the relationship between liberty and order and the proper amount of governmental power.
 - a. Method of evaluation #1: Reading quizzes
 - b. Method of evaluation #2: Midterm exam
 2. Demonstrate the ability to read carefully and to critique written political arguments, and to search for and evaluate the quality of information (“information literacy”).
 - a. Method of evaluation #1: Reading quizzes
 - b. Method of evaluation #2: Writing assignment #3
 - c. Method of evaluation #3: Writing assignment #4
 3. Understand and apply some of the main standards of political science, including defining phenomena in society, and distinguishing fact- and opinion-based arguments.
 - a. Method of evaluation #1: Writing assignment #2
 - b. Method of evaluation #2: Discussion posts
 - c. Method of evaluation #3: Midterm exam
 4. Understand and communicate, in written or verbal form, changes in American political history over time, the reasons behind historical and modern-day disagreements, and the main ideas of influential political thinkers like pluralists and elite theorists.
 - a. Method of evaluation #1: Writing assignment #1
 - b. Method of evaluation #2: Discussion posts
 - c. Method of evaluation #3: Final paper
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Grading Scale:

Letter grades in class will be assigned as follows.

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59

Daily Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Unit I - Getting Started

Class One - Introduction to Studying Political Science (May 18)

Complete the following readings:

- ☐ BSS pp. 3-12, 16-20
- ☐ I also highly recommend having a look at Purdue's political science [homepage](#), particularly if you are thinking you might pursue a major or minor in political science

Complete the following activities:

- ☐ Identify a regular source of political news and information to start reading regularly (some suggested news sources are listed on the course page)
- ☐ Syllabus Quiz (due May 20, 11:59 p.m. EST¹)

Watch the following video:

- ☐ Mini-Lecture 1, "Getting Started"

Class Two - Madisonian Political Thinking (May 20)

Read:

- ☐ BSS, pp. 35-45
- ☐ William Lee Miller, *The Business of May Next*, chapters 1 and 2 [Brightspace]
- ☐ *Federalist* No. 10, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp
- ☐ *Federalist* No. 51, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp

Watch:

- ☐ Mini-Lecture 2, "Introducing James Madison and the *Federalist*"

Activity:

- ☐ Reading Quiz #2 (due May 21, 11:59 p.m.)

Class Three - Early Controversies: The Anti-Federalists (May 22)

Read:

- ☐ BSS pp. 46-51
- ☐ One of the "Anti-Federalist" essays, Brutus I, available at <https://www.constitution.org/afp/brutus01.htm>
- ☐ **(Optional)** "The Anti-Federalists and their important role..." (at <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-anti-federalists-and-their-important-role-during-the-ratification-fight>)

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all assignment deadlines are in Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Activity:

- ❑ Writing Assignment #1 (“Federalist Papers Translation”) due May 23, 11:59 p.m.
- ❑ Reading Quiz #3 (due May 24, 11:59 p.m.)

Watch:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 3, “Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists”

Class Four - Civil Rights and Liberties (May 25)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 87-100, 106-111
- ❑ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- ❑ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy* [ONLY read Chapters 1 and 2]

Activity:

- ❑ Reading Quiz #4 (due May 26, 11:59 p.m.)

Unit II - American Political Institutions

Class Five - The Media in Politics (May 27)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 267-282

Watch:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 4, “Political Media in the Information Age”

Class Six - Campaign Politics, Part I (May 29)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 206-223, 236-241

Activity:

- ❑ Writing Assignment #2 (“Normative and Empirical Claims”) due May 29, 11:59 p.m.
- ❑ Midterm Exam due May 31, 11:59 p.m.

Watch/Listen:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 5, “Campaigns”
- ❑ TED-Ed, “Does your vote count? The Electoral College explained” (at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9H3gvnN468>)
- ❑ *Wicked Game* (Podcast) Episode 4, “Adams vs. Jefferson”

Class Seven - Campaign Politics, Part II (June 1)

- ❑ BSS pp. 241-261
- ❑ The *Washington Post*, “About the Fact-Checker” (at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/07/about-fact-checker/>)

- ❑ (Optional) *PolitiFact*, “Refereeing Pete Buttigieg, Elizabeth Warren on public support for Medicare for all” (at <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2019/oct/16/pete-buttigieg/refereeing-pete-buttigieg-elizabeth-warren-medicar/>)

Watch/Listen:

- ❑ The Atlantic, “Why Can’t Third Parties Take Off?”, (at <https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/486764/why-cant-third-parties-take-off/>)
- ❑ Wicked Game (Podcast) Episode 14, “Van Buren vs. Harrison”

Activity:

- ❑ Reading Quiz #5 (due June 2, 11:59 p.m.)

Class Eight - The Presidency (June 3)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 321-343
- ❑ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power* [Chapter 1 ONLY]
- ❑ Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist* No. 70 (at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed70.asp)
- ❑ (Optional) Peruse the website of the American Presidency Project, an effort to make all important presidential documents available for free online (at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>)

Watch:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 6, “American Presidential Democracy”
- ❑ UK Parliament, “US Elections - How do they work?” (at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRu_JcarCDY&t=111s)

Activity:

- ❑ Reading Quiz #6 (due June 4, 11:59 p.m.)

Class Nine - Congress (June 5)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 287-298
- ❑ Citizens for U.S. Direct Initiatives, “Why Are Sitting Members of Congress Almost Always Re-elected?” (at <https://cusdi.org/faq/why-are-sitting-members-of-congress-almost-always-reelected/>)

Watch:

- ❑ Congress.gov, “The Legislative Process: Overview” (at <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>)

Activity:

- ❑ Reading Quiz #7 (due June 7, 11: 59 p.m.)
- ❑ Writing Assignment #3 (“Elected Official Research”) due June 5, 11:59 p.m.

Class Ten - The Judicial Branch (June 8)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 377-396
- ❑ Amy Howe, *SCOTUSblog*, “Decade in review: The court upholds Obamacare,”
<https://www.scotusblog.com/2019/12/decade-in-review-the-court-upholds-obamacare/>

Watch:

- ❑ Vox, “How a case gets to the US Supreme Court” (at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEjgAXxrkXY>)

Unit IV - Interests and Policies

Class Eleven - Interest Group Politics (June 10)

- ❑ BSS pp. 179-196

Activities:

- ❑ Writing Assignment #4 due June 10 at 11:59 p.m.
- ❑ Reading Quiz #8 (due June 11, 11:59 p.m.)

Watch:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 7, “Pluralism and Interest Groups”

Class Twelve - Foreign Policy (June 12)

Read:

- ❑ BSS pp. 435-445
- ❑ **(Optional)** George Washington’s “Farewell Address” (at
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp)

Activities:

- ❑ Final Paper due by June 14, **5 p.m.**

Watch:

- ❑ Mini-Lecture 8, “The U.S. as a Global Power (and Final Thoughts)”

Course Policies:

Late Assignment Policy:

With the exception of late reading quizzes (which I will stop accepting after 24 hours have elapsed), all assignments submitted late will receive an automatic points deduction of one point per day late, regardless of the quality of work submitted. Barring extenuating circumstances, I will not accept for credit any assignment more than 72 hours late. Extenuating circumstances include, but are not limited to, a medical emergency, a death in the family, or any unforeseen event that limits your ability to access the Internet for extended periods of time.

File Compatibility Policy:

In this course, I receive your work exclusively in digital form, so there is a risk of file incompatibility with the submission portals on Brightspace. Files which are incompatible, corrupted, or which I can't open for some reason are considered late and graded by the late assignment policy described above. I will make an effort to contact students when I notice a problem with their files, but it is your responsibility to confirm that any work you have submitted online does not have compatibility issues. This policy is to your benefit: if you put in the time to complete an assignment, I want you to be able to receive credit for it!

Academic Integrity:

Several assignments are designed to help you learn how to engage with political works by other people. Therefore, it is essential that you document your use of someone else's ideas. ***This requirement applies to all assignments (i.e. discussion posts) that use or refer to the ideas of others, unless I specify otherwise.*** An exception to this rule is the midterm examination. In this class, I do not require a specific citation style. I only request proper use of your preferred format (i.e. APA, Chicago). If you plan to continue taking political science courses, I advise learning the Chicago and American Political Science Association (APSA) formats. For your convenience, here is the University definition of academic dishonesty:

Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty" (Part 5, Section III-B-2-a, Student Regulations). Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest" (University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972).

Nondiscrimination Policy:

I do not anticipate this being a problem, but I will not tolerate discriminatory behavior of any kind toward other members of the class. For your reference, below I have copied the nondiscrimination policy statement from the University's website.

Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life.

Purdue University views, evaluates, and treats all persons in any University related activity or circumstance in which they may be involved, solely as individuals on the basis of their own personal abilities, qualifications, and other relevant characteristics.

Purdue University prohibits discrimination against any member of the University community on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, genetic information, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or status as a veteran. The University will conduct its programs, services and activities consistent with applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and orders and in conformance with the procedures and limitations as set forth in Purdue's Equal Opportunity, Equal Access and Affirmative Action policy which provides specific contractual rights and remedies. Additionally, the University promotes the full realization of equal employment opportunity for women, minorities, persons with disabilities and veterans through its affirmative action program.

Policy on Accessibility:

I want to provide a setting where anyone can thrive as a student. If you anticipate ANY academic barriers based on disability, I request that you let me know so that we can discuss any necessary arrangements. I encourage you to start the process at the Disability Resource Center at drc@purdue.edu, or by phone at 765-494-1247. More details are available on Brightspace under 'Accessibility Information'. I am also more than happy to help facilitate this process.

Statement on Mental Health:

Mental health is crucial for your academic work. Please contact me if you feel mental health concerns are holding you back in this course, especially in light of the drastic changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. I also invite you to consider the following University resources:

- ***If you find yourself beginning to feel some stress, anxiety and/or feeling slightly overwhelmed, try [WellTrack](#).*** Sign in and find information and tools at your fingertips, available to you at any time.
- ***If you need support and information about options and resources, please contact or see the [Office of the Dean of Students](#).*** Normal drop-in hours are M-F, 8 am- 5 pm.
- ***If you're struggling and need mental health services:*** Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office of the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.