PSCI 110-001: American Government
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Winter 2022
Monday/Weds at 4PM
Office Hours: Weds 10-12

Overview & goals

Please note that this syllabus is designed for a course taught at Drexel University, which uses the quarter system, with 10 weeks per term.

This course gives an introduction to the analysis of American politics. The textbook that we are using takes a historical approach in order to answer both how does American government work and why do we do it this way. Historical development and institutional change are the organizing themes of the book and this course. I have supplemented this book with reading and exercises that speak to our rapidly changing politics, especially regarding American racial politics. This course will prepare you to take advanced courses in the field of American Politics, including American Political Development, State & Local Politics, Constitutional Law (I, II, and III), The Presidency, among many others.

When this course is over, you will:

- Have a more sophisticated grasp of American political institutions and processes (e.g., the branches of national government, federalism, public opinion, participation, and so on);

- Be familiar with models and concepts that political scientists use to analyze American politics;

- Be ready for more specialized courses in American politics;

- Have gotten practice writing clearly and persuasively.

Finally, learning is a two-way street. Come to me if you have suggestions/problems/pictures of otters holding hands. So long as you are kind, read the syllabus, and do the work, you should do well in this course.

Books & Readings

- Cal Jillson, American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change 11th edition. You may purchase this through the bookstore or buy a used copy off of Amazon.

- Journal articles may be found through the library's many databases or Google scholar.

- Select chapters from other readings will be posted to BB.

Assessment and Assignments

Assessment for this class uses "The Learning Record." A full guide is on the course Blackboard site and we will go over the process in detail during the first week of class. Simply, the Learning Record (LR) is a portfolio-style assessment system. It helps you to gather, organize, analyze, evaluate, and report on your individual progress and achievement throughout the term. The LR enables you to show what you have learned individually as well as demonstrate how you contributed to the collective learning effort. Balancing individual learning with collaborative effort is difficult to do using traditional grading schemes, which is why this assessment system is

particularly useful for courses that utilize a lot of group activities. Also, it is often difficult to reward experimental and creative learning through traditional grading techniques, because traditional grading focuses on deliverables such as tests or papers. Experimental learning, on the other hand, does not always result in high-quality deliverables, because it involves building something new that may or may not be successful. The LR focuses on your learning process rather than the outcomes, which gives your instructor a detailed sense of what you have learned. Hopefully, it gives you the confidence to think big and take risks in your research, problem-solving, and design work. Moreover, doing a learning record in this introductory class will also begin a long-term research project that you can carry to more advanced courses in Political Science.

Ongoing assignments: Two observations per week posted to your individual Microsoft Teams channel. These are part of the data that will go into your midterm portfolio. You may also post your observations to the shared class channel.

Format and example:

Date: 6/30/2022

Context: Reading "America Wasn't a Democracy"

Observation: The founding of the United States is not so clear

Significance of the observation: In high school, I learned that the United States was founded in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence. In this article, the author claims that the real date is 1619 because it was the first time that people purchased African slaves in the colonies. The author argues that this is the true founding because the United States is not founded in equality, like I was taught in High School, but with inequality. It also made me think about how the founding looks different to different people. Maybe it is 1776 if you are a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, but maybe 1619 if you trace your family's history back to slavery.

Individual assignments

Weekly Reading Quizzes – You complete these online through Blackboard. These are low-stakes quizzes designed to keep your reading on track and reinforce class knowledge.

In Class activities: Throughout the term, there will be a few in-class activities that you will submit on MSTeams. These will become part of your LR portfolio.

Reports: Since one stated goal of this class is to help you think about politics like a political scientist thinks about politics, you will submit a series of reports that answer key questions about American politics. Each assignment asks you to apply the content knowledge you receive from the textbook, readings, and course lectures to a political dilemma. We will look at different data sources, use that data to make assertions about the nature of political problems, and apply evidence in thinking about these puzzles. These reports will articulate an argument supported by data and theory.

You will work on these in class and on your own. These will be submitted each Friday using MSTeams. I will make comments that you may apply should you revise your reports.

At the midterm and final, you will choose **one** of these reports to revise, extend, and submit as part of your LR portfolio.

In revising your reports, your revision should address the following questions:

1) Why does this study matter for the practice of American politics? Is there a contemporary issue (as opposed to theoretical problem) to which this puzzle relates? What difference might your study make in reforming or redesigning American political institutions?

2) What are the contending sides? What, in other words, are the political implications of your research or argument? Who wins, who loses?

3) Are your data valid measures of the political phenomenon you are studying? What limits exist in your data? Are there alternative measures that you could collect that would better address the puzzle or problem studied?

4) What other knowledge must we acquire or create in order to better understand the puzzle explored in this report?

Schedule of work

Week 1
January 3 The Learning Record and American Democracy

Nikole Hannah-Jones, "America Wasn't a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made it One," New York Times Magazine, 18 August 2019 https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html

January 5: The Origins of American Government: Chapter 1 in Jillson

In Class Project: Interview each other on what you know about American Politics. Share what you learned in a LR observation.

Week 2
January 10: Developing the Constitution

Jillson, Chapter 2

In Class Activity: Acknowledging Native Land
- Identify a location that you are interested in. This could be where you currently live, where you grew up, or a place you might like to live someday. Visit https://native-land.ca/ to figure out what indigenous land your zip code is settled on.
   - Who lived on this land before it was settled?
   - What languages were spoken?
   - What treaties were created?
Write a 250-word reflection on what you found. Share it to MSTeams.

January 12: How Democratic is the American Constitution?

Douglas: What to the Slave is the 4th of July? **BB**

Dahl: What the Framers Couldn't Know **BB**

Report: How Democratic is the American Constitution?

Week 3
January 17: No Class, MLK Day

January 19: Federalism – Jillson, Chapter 3 + Valelly - "Elements of American Democracy" from American
       Politics: A Very Short Introduction [available on BB]

Report: How has federalism evolved over time?

Week 4
January 24: Congress – Jillson, Chapter 9

January 26 : The legislative-executive process – Valelly, Chapter 4 of *American Politics: A Very Short
Introduction* **BB**

Report: How do the two houses of Congress reflect different national priorities? How do the members of
Congress represent their constituents in multiple ways?

Week 5
January 31: The Presidency – Jillson, Chapter 10 + Coats, Chapter 5, *We Were Eight Years in Power* **BB**

February 2: In Class – Work on preparing for the midterm portfolio.

Week 6
February 7: The Bureaucracy – Jillson, Chapter 11

February 9: The Judiciary – Jillson, Chapter 12 + Review Article III of the Constitution

Report: How does the bureaucracy support the American economy?

Week 7
February 14: The Judiciary Continued. Please read Dahl, Robert A. "Decision-making in a democracy: The
Supreme Court as a national policy-maker." *J. Pub. L.* 6 (1957) + Jamal Greene, "Interpretation," in *The Oxford
Handbook of the U.S. Constitution*, ed. Mark Tushnet, Mark A. Graber, and Sanford Levinson **BB**

February 16: Elections – Jillson, Chapter 8

Report: How have different styles of constitutional interpretation supported or undermined minority rights?

Week 8
February 21: Parties – Jillson, Chapter 7 + Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, "The Republican Devolution:
Partisanship and the Decline of American Governance," Foreign Affairs 98 (July/August 2019): 42-51.

February 23: Interest Groups – Jillson, Chapter 6

Report: How do single-member electoral districts distort represented interests?

Week 9
February 28 Civil Liberties – Jillson, Chapter 13

March 2 Civil Rights – Jillson, Chapter 14

Report: How are civil rights and civil liberties protected?

Week 10
March 7 Public Opinion – Jillson, Chapter 4

March 9 Conclusion and reflections – What will 2022 bring?

No report this week. Prepare for your final portfolio submission.