



Department of History and Political Science
Political Science 165: Introduction to American Government
Fall 2017 Syllabus



Meeting Days: Monday and Wednesday	Instructor: Professor Shawn E. Fields
Meeting Times: 2:55 p.m. – 4:40 p.m.	Email: sfields1@pointloma.edu
Meeting Location: Colt Hall 120	Office location: Clara Colt Hall 118
Midterm Exam: October 18 from 2:55-4:40 p.m.	Office Hours: Mon. & Wed., 9:45-10:45 a.m.
Final Exam: TBD	Course Website: https://canvas.pointloma.edu

PLNU MISSION

To Teach ~ To Shape ~ To Send

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service is an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we strive to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As a General Education Course: This course is one of the components of the GE Program at PLNU, under the category of “Exploring an Interdependent World.” By including this course in a common educational experience for undergraduates, the faculty supports an introduction to the natural and social sciences as tools for exploring the world, with emphasis on collecting and interpreting empirical data for both theoretical and practical purposes.

Specifically: Has there ever been a more exciting – or important – time to study politics? Our nation recently experienced one of the most historically significant and unprecedented presidential elections in over a century. The President of the United States remains the subject of investigation into his role in foreign meddling in the integrity of the U.S. electoral process. And beyond our borders, a nation in the Western hemisphere devolves from democracy to dictatorship for the first time in history (Venezuela), while another drifts ever closer to the type of authoritarian antagonism reminiscent of the Cold War (Russia). Entire regions of the world remain beset by economic turmoil (Latin America, particularly Venezuela and Brazil), crippling insecurity (the Middle East), or both (increasingly, the entire Euro Zone following “Brexit”). Truly, one must study the science of politics to understand this rapidly changing world and to become responsible and engaged citizens within it.

But what is “political science” exactly? What does it mean to “be political”? And can politics really be regarded as a “science” in the traditional sense of the word? There are no easy answers to these questions, and debates rage on each of these issues in the academic community and beyond. But this course, with your help and involvement, will attempt to get at the heart of these questions.

It is important for all students to understand two basic precepts about this course. First, Political Science is a gigantic field of study, with many different sub-disciplines, including political theory, American government, comparative politics, international relations, and public administration. Second, this is a one-semester survey course, meaning that our time is limited. This course is designed to provide you with an overview introduction to the discipline of Political Science as a whole, meaning we will not have time to delve as deeply into any one area as we might like. However, I hope this course piques your interest in the study of politics, and I encourage you to observe which portions of the course you find most engaging and seek out upper level courses in those fields.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- 1) Possess a factual and theoretical understanding of political knowledge, behavior, theories, systems, processes, structures, and outcomes
- 2) Think critically, analytically, and synthetically
- 3) Sharpen their communication skills
- 4) Exhibit a heightened sense of personal political efficacy and civil responsibility
- 5) Be encouraged to become thoughtful participants of the political world
- 6) Be exposed to some of the most pressing political problems of the day, including poverty, voting rights, gender inequity, lack of freedom, and declining participation rates.

COURSE READINGS

Required Texts: Joseph Losco & Ralph Baker, AM GOV (5th ed. 2017-2018).

Selected Readings on Canvas (see Syllabus and Canvas for details)

ADDITIONAL READINGS

As budding political scientists and citizens, you should regularly follow current political events at the local, national, and international level. Make it a habit now that continues throughout your lifetime – you wake up, grab a cup of coffee, and read the news (and no, Facebook feeds, other social media outlets, and BuzzFeed quizzes and listicles do not count as “news”). I’d love to see you explore more sophisticated news outlets, such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, NPR, BBC News, *The Atlantic*, and *The Economist*. I strongly recommend you peruse these media sources on a regular basis and contribute what relevant information you learn with class.

COURSE FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS

Politics is an inherently interactive endeavor, and it has been shown time and again that the best learning methods involve hands-on, interactive practice of new concepts. Therefore, this class will involve a lot of student-directed learning, group engagement, and critical thinking that goes well beyond the assigned reading. However, for this learning model to succeed, it is critically important that students COME TO CLASS and COME TO CLASS PREPARED. We cannot build on the readings and engage in higher level critical thinking without students being present and prepared.

For that reason, I expect the following from all my students:

1. **Attend Class:** Attendance is mandatory and will only be excused with both prior notice and a good justification for the absence. I recognize that each of you are extremely busy during the semester and that life happens from time to time, so if you must miss a class for some reason please provide with as much advance notice as possible. Attendance will be taken each class.
2. **Come to Class Prepared:** I have intentionally assigned very short readings for each class, so that each student can have time to read, review and critically think about the course materials BEFORE class. For example, many classes have only 10-20 pages of reading, whereas my introductory political science class in college averaged 150 pages of reading per week. It is very important that you complete all the assigned reading and come to class prepared to participate in a discussion about the reading and its main concepts.
3. **Complete all Coursework:** In addition to the graded midterm and final exam for this class, I will occasionally assign short “read and respond” writing exercises throughout the semester. These assignments will generally take the form of a hypothetical fact pattern relating to a topic covered in class and require you to think analytically and provide your own opinion in response to prompted questions following the fact pattern. These assignments are not given an individual grade, but satisfactory completion of these assignments is required to pass the course.
4. **Engage:** Our class will be interactive, meaning that I expect to do less talking than in a typical lecture survey course. I will expect each of you to participate, and I will work hard to facilitate a safe space for discussion and a respectful exchange of ideas.

ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

The following components of the class count towards your final grade:

1. **Read and Respond Papers**: At various times throughout the semester I will draft a hypothetical political scenario and ask for high level critical thinking to apply the concepts learned in class to that hypothetical situation. These response papers are not designed to regurgitate vocabulary or definitions, but to apply your knowledge to a new set of facts.
2. **Midterm**: The midterm exam will test your knowledge and understanding of concepts discussed through the first few weeks of class, and will consist of a mix of short response questions and higher level critical thinking essays. More details about the structure of the exam will be discussed closer to exam time.
3. **Final**: The final exam will test your knowledge and understanding of concepts discussed through the entire semester and will consist of a mix of short response questions and higher level critical thinking essays. More details about the structure of the exam will be discussed closer to exam time.
4. **Attendance and Participation**: As discussed above, attendance and participation are both essential and mandatory for the class.

GRADING

The final grade is weighted as follows:

Assignment	Point Value
Read and Respond	20
Midterm	50
Final	100
Attendance and Participation	30
TOTAL	200

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Given the topical nature of this course, the schedule below is flexible and subject to change. Teaching a Political Science course during such a period of unprecedented political upheaval is always an exciting challenge. I want to be sure we have the flexibility and freedom in our schedule to discuss current events as they relate to the overarching themes of this course. Accordingly, the timing and substance of assignments and readings may change, as well as class days and times. Revisions to the syllabus will be provided and distributed as they become necessary.

NOTE: THERE IS NO CLASS ON AUGUST 29. THE FIRST CLASS WILL MEET ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2017.

PART ONE: THE CHANGING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Week 1: Aug. 30 **Introduction and Welcome; Where is America Headed?**

NOTE: **There is no class on Tuesday, August 29**

Reading: For Wed: AM GOV pp. 1-16

PART TWO: OUR NATION'S FOUNDING; THE CONSTITUTION

Week 2: Sept. 6 **The Foundations of American Democracy**

NOTE: **There is no class on Monday, September 4 (Labor Day)**

Reading: For Wed: AM GOV 16-37

PART THREE: FEDERALISM

Week 3: Sept. 11 & 13 **The Division of Governmental Power; Federal-State Relations**

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 42-54

For Wed: AM GOV 54-66

PART FOUR: CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Week 4: Sept. 18 & 20 **The First Amendment; The Second Amendment; The Rights of the Accused; The Right to Privacy**

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 69-86

For Wed: AM GOV 87-102

Week 5: Sept. 25 & 27 **The Fourteenth Amendment; Minority Groups and Civil Rights**

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 106-118

For Wed: AM GOV 118-136

PART FIVE: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Week 6: Oct. 2 & 4: Public Opinion

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 136-151
For Wed: AM GOV 151-161

Week 7: Oct. 9 & 11 Political Participation; Voting

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 161-171
For Wed: AM GOV 171-189

Week 8: Oct 16 & 18 Midterm Review Midterm Exam

Reading: For Monday: Review Midterm Review Handout
For Wed: No Reading – STUDY STUDY!

PART SIX: POLITICAL PARTIES

Week 9: Oct. 23 & 25 The Purpose of Political Parties; Why a Two-Party System?; Republicans, Democrats, and the Rest; Electoral Politics

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 218-231
For Wed: AM GOV 231-249

PART SEVEN: THE MEDIA

Week 10: Oct. 30 The Evolving Media Environment; The “Very Dishonest” Media; Fake News

NOTE: There is no class on Wednesday, November 1

Reading: For Monday: AM GOV 249-264

Week 11: Nov. 6 & 8

Campaign Coverage in the Media; What is News?

Reading:

For Monday: AM GOV 264-283

For Wed: Selected Readings on Canvas TBD

PART EIGHT: THE THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

Week 12: Nov. 13 & 15

Congress

Reading:

For Monday: AM GOV 283-297

For Wed: AM GOV 298-322

Week 13: Nov. 20

The President

NOTE:

There is no class on Wednesday, November 22

Reading:

For Monday: AM GOV 322-337

PART VII: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Week 14: Nov. 27 & 29

The President; The Judiciary

Reading:

For Monday: AM GOV 337-362

For Wed: AM GOV 388-399

Week 15: Dec. 4 & 6

The Courts; Final Exam Review

Reading:

For Monday: AM GOV 399-417

For Wed: Selected Readings on Canvas TBD
Review Final Exam Handout

FINAL EXAM: TBD
