



PSCI 210: Introduction to American Government

Spring 2021

Instructor: Kal Munis, Ph.D.
Location: Online
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Instructor Office Hours: By appointment (email me) on [Zoom](#)

Teaching Assistant: Keegan Nashan
Teaching Assistant E-Mail keegan.nashan@umconnect.umt.edu
Teaching Assistant Office Hours: Mondays on [Zoom from Noon-1 pm](#); Tuesdays on [Zoom from 1-3 pm](#)

Note: Ms. Nashan is your first point of contact for this course! In other words, if you have a question about the course or need help, you should email her first. If your question cannot be resolved by Ms. Nashan, then you should reach out to me.

Course Overview and Aims

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. It is designed to provide you with a foundation that will allow you to understand, interpret, and participate in the American political system. In this course we will examine the theoretical ideas surrounding the foundation and development of America's political culture and institutions. Along the way we will also consider some recent and contemporary developments in American politics. Students will also be introduced to the sort of work that social scientists and sophisticated observers of American politics (such as the team at *FiveThirtyEight* or the *New York Times*' "UpShot") do to understand politics.

Upon reaching the conclusion of the course, students should be able confidently discuss core features of American democracy (e.g., the Constitution, federal system, civil liberties), relationships between America's political institutions (e.g., Congress, the Presidency, Judiciary, the bureaucracy), and understand a number of important social science theories used by social scientists to understand other important features of American politics (e.g., political behavior, political communication, electoral campaigns, interest groups, political parties).

Required Text and Other Readings

All students are encouraged to purchase a copy of the textbook as it will be indispensable to your mastery of the course. Copies are available at multiple online retailers. I recommend either renting the book or buying a used copy if possible. If a previous edition is used, the student is required to calibrate her or his new copy; they will still be held accountable for all material in the current edition (I can confirm that the 8th edition is essentially identical in all meaningful ways, as is the 10th:

Jillson, Cal. 2016. *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change (9th edition)*. New York, NY: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1138229693

All other readings are posted on Moodle for you to download. This includes an additional chapter from the 9th edition of the Jillson textbook that is not printed in used copies offered by the bookstore. Additional readings may be posted as the course proceeds.

Requirements and Grading

Argumentative Essays: 40% (2 essays at 20% each)

Discussion Forum: 18%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 22%

Argumentative Essays: Throughout the course of the semester, students will complete two essay assignments. These assignments are intended to be relatively short essays (four to five pages) that allow you to articulate *and* develop your position (i.e., your argument/thesis) on various historical and contemporary political events. You should marshal evidence where needed, such as from the textbook, online readings, lecture, sources beyond the source, as well as your own experience (where appropriate). Strong essays will be efficient and appropriate in scope (taking into consideration page limits)—in other words, avoid trying to do too much in the space provided. Essay 1 due: 01/29; Essay 2 due: 03/26

Discussion Forum: In even numbered weeks (except week 10) – beginning in week 2 – students will be expected to participate in an online discussion forum hosted on the course Moodle site. Each of these six forums is worth 3% of the overall course grade. Some weeks students will be expected to be discussion initiators whereas during other weeks they will be expected to be commenters who engage thoughtfully with the post of a discussion initiator. Broad topics for each of these weeks will be provided by the instructor and guidelines for discussion will be posted on the course website.

Exams: Exams will be conducted online (on Moodle). The midterm exam will be made available on February 26th. The final exam will be cumulative in nature, though with an emphasis on the second half of the course. The final will be administered online during the designated exam slot (see the bottom of the very last page of this syllabus) on April 28th.

Grades: Grades will be assigned according to the following percentages:

A 93-100	B 83-86.9	C 73-76.9	D 63-66.9	below 60 F
A- 90-92.9	B- 80-82.9	C- 70-72.9	D- 60-62.9	
B+ 87-89.9	C+ 77-79.9	D+ 67-69.9		

Note*: To excel in this course, you must do the readings *and* watch and listen to the lectures.

Academic Honesty

All students must practice academic honesty. Section 420 of the student Conduct Code describes academic misconduct as including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, multiple submissions, or facilitating others' misconduct. According to Section 430 of the Student Code, the sanctions imposed by

course instructors can range from oral reprimand to a failing grade in the course. I impose the maximum possible sanction: a zero on the assignment, which generally leads to a failing course grade. More on plagiarism can be found here:

<http://www.umt.edu/ethics/courses/researchethics/ugresearchethics/ftp2.php> .

Course Policies & Advice:

- This is an online course. The teaching assistant and I will do every reasonable thing to make taking this course more convenient in these very inconvenient times that we now find ourselves in. That said, realize that online education does place considerably more burden on the student (you) than an in-person class would. You must keep on top of deadlines and take initiative to ask for help if you need it.
- The course schedule is a guideline of how I plan on the course proceeding. I reserve the right to change the material as the class proceeds if the need arises. You will be informed of these changes through e-mail and/or Moodle.
- If you have a serious problem in your personal life, contact me immediately (via my email address listed at the top of this syllabus). Problems can be resolved if you bring them up before you miss a deadline. I frequently check my email and will happily respond to most questions, but do not abuse this privilege.

Exceptions to Course Expectations and Policies

Exceptions to course expectations and policies will be made based on ADA-protected accommodations facilitated by the Office of Disability, Re-Entry, and Veteran Services, interim measures per the University's Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Dating Violence, Domestic Violence, Stalking, and Retaliation Policy, for individuals in the armed forces who have duty-related absences, and when necessary to comply with other state and federal civil rights laws.

Any other exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis as necessary.

Class Schedule

WEEK 1

January 11th – 15th

American Political Principles

- Jillson, Chapter 1

American Idiosyncrasy ... or why are things the way they are?

- Jonathan Rauch Ray La Raja, "[Too Much Democracy is Bad for Democracy](#)"
- Lee Drutman, "Let a Thousand Parties Bloom," *Foreign Policy*

WEEK 2

January 18th – 22nd

Debating the Constitution and Founding, Federalist Perspectives

- Jillson, Chapter 2
- Federalist 10
- Federalist 51
- Federalist 49 (on altering the Constitution)

Debating the Constitutional and Founding, Anti-Federalist Perspectives

- Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For* (a selection)
- Centinel “The Small Republic Argument”
- Jefferson, “On Re-Writing the Constitution Each Generation”
- Jefferson, Three Letters (selection)

WEEK 3

*** Argumentative Essay 1 due by 10 p.m. MST, Friday, January 29th on Moodle***

January 25th – 29th

Federalism

- Jillson, Chapter 3
- Federalist 39 (on federalism)
- Martha Derthick, “The Enduring Features of American Federalism”
- [“David French and I debate polarization, secession, and the filibuster.”](#) *The Ezra Klein Show*, Vox

WEEK 4

February 1st – 5th

Civil Liberties

- Jillson, Chapter 13

Civil Rights

- Jillson, Chapter 14
- *Obergefell v Hodges* Dissenting Opinion (authored by Justice Antonin Scalia)
- *Obergefell v Hodges* Majority Opinion (authored by Justice Anthony Kennedy)

WEEK 5

February 8th – 12th

The Presidency

- Jillson, Chapter 10
- Harvey Mansfield, “The Case for a Strong Executive”
- Abraham Lincoln, “Letter to Albert Hodges, 4 April 1864”
- Supreme Court, *Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. v. Sawyer* (1952)

The Bureaucracy

- Jillson, Chapter 11
- Rachel Potter, “Bending the Rules: How Procedures Matter in the Bureaucracy”

WEEK 6

*** Midterm Week ***

February 15th – 19th

Congress

- Jillson, Chapter 9
- Evan Bayh, “Why I’m Leaving the Senate”
- Lee Hamilton, “What I Wish”

The Judiciary

- Jillson, Chapter 12
- Brutus, “The Problem of Judicial Review”
- Thomas Jefferson on Judicial Power

WEEK 7

February 22nd – 26th

*** Midterm Exam hosted online on Friday, February 26th. Exam will be available from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. ***

- More details (exam duration, format, etc.) will be announced via email.

Political Parties

- Jillson, Chapter 6
- Matt Grossman and David Hopkins, “[How different are the Democratic and Republican Parties? Too Different to Compare.](#)”
 - Alternatively, you can listen to [this podcast](#) rather than read the *WaPo* piece above.

WEEK 8

March 1st – 5th

The Media and Politics & Political Communication Effects

- Jillson, Chapter 5 (skim)
- Nicholas Valentino and Yioryos Nardis, “Political Communication: Form and Consequence of the Information Environment,” *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*
- Hendrickson, Clara. 2019. *Local Journalism in Crisis*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution.

WEEK 9

March 8th – 12th

*** NO CLASS TO MAKE UP US NOT TAKING ANY DAYS OFF EARLIER IN SEMESTER LIKE WE NORMALLY WOULD HAVE IN PERSON (I.E., FOR MLK DAY AND PRESIDENT’S DAY) ***

WEEK 10

March 15th – 19th

*** NO CLASS – THIS IS OUR “SPRING BREAK” ***

WEEK 11

March 22nd – March 26th

*** **Argumentative Essay 2 due by 10 p.m. MST, Friday, March 26th on Blackboard*****

Interest Groups, Political Participation, Voting, and Elections

- Jillson, Chapter 7 (skim)
- Jonathan Samples, “Money and Speech,” *The Fallacy of Campaign Finance Reform*
- Jillson, Chapter 8 (skim)
- “[What is Gerrymandering?](#)”, episode 1 of the Gerrymandering Project podcast, *FiveThirtyEight*
- Morris Fiorina, “[The Myth of the Majority-Minority Nation](#),” *Real Clear Politics*
- Kal Munis and Robert P. Saldin, “Nationalization and the Urban-Rural Divide” (title may be different than what we ultimately settle on – it had yet to be published at the time this syllabus was created)

WEEK 12

March 29th – April 2nd

Public Opinion and Political Psychology

- Jillson, Chapter 4 (skim)
- [Wiki Summary: Philip Converse's *The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics*](#)
- Mason, L. & Wronski, Julie (2018). One Tribe to Bind Them All: How Our Social Attachments Strengthen Partisanship. *Advances in Political Psychology*.

Political Psychology and Race.

- Donald Kinder, "Prejudice and Politics," *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*
- [Podcast discussing Ashley Jardina's new book, *White Identity Politics*](#)

WEEK 13

April 5th – April 9th

Special Topics: Race and the Carceral State

- Vesla Weaver. "The Carceral State and American Political Development." (with A. Lerman). In *Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*, R. Lieberman, S. Mettler, and R. Valelly, eds., 2016
- ["Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery"](#)

Special Topics: Race and Policing

- Jefferson, Hakeem J., Fabian G. Neuner, and Josh Pasek. No date. "Seeing Blue in Black and White: Race and Perceptions of Officer-Involved Shootings." Working Paper.

Vesla M. Weaver. 2015. ["The Missing Lesson of Ferguson: Conduct ≠ Contact"](#)

Week 14

April 12th – April 16th

Special Topics: Women, U.S. Politics and the Underrepresentation of Women in Politics

- Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard L. Fox. 2012. “Men Rule: The Continued Underrepresentation of Women in U.S. Politics.” Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute.
- Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard L. Fox. 2017. “The Trump Effect.” Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute.

WEEK 15

April 19th – 23rd

Special Topics: Women and Representation

- Anzia, Sarah F. and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3):478-93.
- Volden, Craig, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer. 2013. “When Are Women More Effective Legislators Than Men?” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(2): 326-341.

***** FINAL EXAM *****

Date: April 28th

Location: Online

Availability: 9 am – 10 pm

Duration (i.e., Exam Window): 3 hours

*General disclaimer: The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus throughout the semester.