POLSCI 116: Introduction to American Politics

Fall, 2024

Class:

- Tu/Th 11:45am - 1:00pm, Biological Sciences 113

Discussion Sections:

- W 12:00-12:50pm, Physics 227

- F 12:00-12:50pm, LSRC D243

Instructor:	Jon Geen (Professor)	Joel-Anthoney Bossous (TA)
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Office Hours:	W 4-5, F 2-3, or by appointment Gross Hall 294H	TBD TBD

Course Description

Political scientists commonly refer to politics as society's process of determining who gets what. This course addresses questions concerning how politics works in the United States. Why does the United States have its system of government, how can we evaluate whether it is working as intended, and how might we change it? What is public opinion, and how does it bear on public policy? How do people decide whether to vote and who to vote for? In short, how does the United States determine who gets what?

This is an introductory course. The answers it will provide to these questions (and many others) will be broader than they are deep. Students who are successful in this course will have a foundation for further study in more advanced political science courses. More importantly, they will be better equipped to understand, navigate, and participate in U.S. politics in their daily lives.

This is a political science course, not a venue for practicing politics itself. This distinction is important. We will discuss topics such as how bills become laws and how we administer elections; we will not debate which bills should (not) become laws or who we should vote for in the next election. That is, we will discuss our process of determining who gets what, but we will not debate who ought to get what. This is not to discourage you from engaging in these debates! This is to encourage you to do so outside of class in settings ranging from informal discussions with friends and acquaintances to the pages of the Duke Chronicle.

Office Hours

Office hours are time formally set aside for you to ask questions about course material, assignments, or anything else you think is relevant. While I prefer that you use the listed in-person office hours if possible, you are welcome to email me to set up an alternative appointment if necessary.

Course Text

I ask that you rent or purchase the following textbook, which we will use throughout the course. All other course materials will be posted on Canvas.

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2021. *The Logic of American Politics, 11th Edition*. CQ Press.

If you are having difficulty with costs associated with this course, Duke makes the following relevant resources available:

- Contact the financial aid office (whether or not you are on aid) for information on loans or connections to other resources on campus that could help alleviate these costs.

- DukeLIFE offers course materials assistance for eligible students. Students who are eligible for DukeLIFE benefits are notified prior to the beginning of the semester.

Evaluation

Your final grade for the semester will be a weighted average of the following components (weights in parentheses):

Attendance and Preparation (35%)

There is an accumulating body of evidence (supported by strong theoretical intuitions) that consistently reading the assigned material and attending class are the two strongest correlates of learning. This course is designed to structure your incentives accordingly.

- Toward the end of each class, I will post a short quiz based on the reading for that day. In order to receive credit for this quiz, you must turn in a *physical copy* of your answers as you exit class.

  - Because you must turn in a physical copy, you should come to class with scratch paper and something to write with.

  - Because these quizzes count as attendance for lecture, they cannot be rescheduled.

- Each quiz is worth two points. The first point is for turning it in (i.e. the attendance component). The second point is for how well you do on the quiz itself. So for example, turning in a quiz and getting 4/5 points on the substance is worth $(1 + 0.8)/2$ points, or 90%.

- Before calculating the final quiz grade average, I will drop quizzes associated with:

  - Excused absences
  - No more than one unexcused absence (see attendance policy below)
  - The two lowest remaining quiz grades

Discussion Section (15%)

In addition to lectures, we will divide into two discussion sections where we will engage with the week's material in greater depth. Credit for discussion section is divided into two parts:

- Discussion questions (5%)

  - You are expected to circulate one discussion question based on what you have read (or listened to/watched, if applicable) for each meeting of your discussion section, due by 6:00am the day of your section's meeting.
  - By "discussion question" I mean a question that serves as a jumping-off point for exploring the material in greater depth. Questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" are not *discussion* questions, and will not receive credit (these questions can almost always be rephrased as discussion questions by using words like "how," "what," or "why").

- Attendance and participation (10%)

  - There will not be additional quizzes during discussion section – you will simply sign in for attendance – but we reserve the right to cold-call or (in extreme cases) withhold participation credit if it is apparent that the group as a whole is not prepared.
  - Everyone has different learning styles, and participation in class discussion includes listening as well as speaking. You do not have to talk a lot for talking's sake in order to earn full participation credit.

ChatGPT Reviews (30%)

This course is divided into three sections: Foundations, Institutions, and the Public. At the beginning of each section, I will provide you with an essay prompt relevant to that section and ChatGPT 4o's output in response to that prompt. At the end of each section, you will turn in an annotated copy of that output, highlighting its limitations in the context of what we have covered.

Each of these reviews will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Final Exam (20%)

This exam will be held during our scheduled exam period, and will consist of a mixture of multiple choice and short response questions designed to assess your cumulative mastery of material throughout the course as a whole.

Due Dates

- ChatGPT Review 1: September 26

- ChatGPT Review 2: October 22

- ChatGPT Review 3: December 7

- Final Exam: December 12th, 9am-12pm

Reading and Course Materials

With the exception of textbook, all readings and audio/visual course materials will be posted on Canvas.

I expect you to read, listen to, and/or watch a non-trivial amount of material on your own in order to prepare for class. However, being prepared does not necessarily mean that you have read every page of the material in full depth. Reading quizzes will be designed to test your understanding of key arguments/broader points – *not* your memory of specific facts that appear on specific pages. Approach the material with this in mind. Reading strategically is an important skill that I encourage you to practice in this course.

Course Schedule

This course is divided into three parts: Foundations, Institutions, and the Public. Each week covers a discrete topic. Lecture dates are in parentheses.

Part 1: Foundations

- Week 1 (August 27/29): Introduction

  - August 27: No assigned reading

  - August 29:

    * Noel, Hans. 2010. "Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't" *The Forum* 8(3), Article 12.
    * Hersh, Eitan. "Politics is for Power, Not Consumption." *Boston Review*, November 4, 2019. (Link).
    * (LISTEN) "'How Democracies Die' Authors Say Trump Is A Symptom Of 'Deeper Problems.'" NPR, January 22, 2018 (Link)
      · The first part (up to 13:05) is optional

- Week 2 (September 3/5): Democratic Citizenship and Collective Action

  - September 3: **ChatGPT Review 1 posted**
    * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 1
    * W.E.B. Dubois, 1920. "Of the Ruling of Men" (Link).

* (WATCH) The social contract (Khan Academy) ([Link](#)).

– September 5:

* Mansbridge, Jane. 2014. "What is Political Science For?" *Perspectives on Politics* 12(1): 8-17.
* Matthews, Dylan. "Did a 1982 book predict America's decline?" Vox, October 2, 2022 ([Link](#)).

• Week 3 (September 10/12): The Constitution

– September 10 (Second Presidential Debate):

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 2
* *The Federalist Papers*, 10 and 51 (included as Appendices 4 and 5 in *Logic of American Politics*)
* (LISTEN) How Presidential Debates Influence Voters. Science of Politics Podcast, Niskasen Center. August 14, 2019 ([Link](#)).

– September 12:

* Roche, John P. 1961. "The Founding Fathers: A Reform Caucus in Action." *American Political Science Review* 55(4): 799-816.
* Linz, Juan. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51-69.
* Trende, Sean. "It's Time to Increase the Size of the House." Sabato's Crystal Ball, March 6, 2014 ([Link](#))
* "Who Won the First Biden-Trump Debate?" FiveThirtyEight, June 28, 2024. ([Link](#))
  · Note that FiveThirtyEight usually publishes these immediately following each debate; I'll swap this one out in favor of the second debate pre/post poll if it's available in time.

• Week 4 (September 17/19): Federalism

– September 19:

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 3
* Fertig, Natalie. "The Great American cannabis experiment." *Politico*, August 14, 2019 ([Link](#)).
* (WATCH) Federalism: Crash Course Government and Politics #4 ([Link](#)).

– September 21:

* Frymer, Paul. 2014. "'A Rush and a Push and the Land Is Ours': Territorial Expansion, Land Policy, and U.S. State Formation." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(1): 119-144.
* Grumbach, Jacob, and Jamila Michener. 2022. "American Federalism, Political Inequality, and Democratic Erosion." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 699, 143-155.

• Week 5 (September 24/26): Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

– September 24:

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 5
* Toobin, Jeffrey. "Gawker's Demise and the Trump-Era Threat to the First Amendment." *New Yorker*, December 11, 2016. (Link).
* Kerr, Orin. 2020. "Line Drawing." *Journal of Legal Education* 70(1): 162-170.
* OPTIONAL:
  · White, Ken. "In Defense of Free Speech Pedantry: Why You Should Clarify Which Free Speech Value You're Debating." December 18, 2022. (Link).

– September 26: **ChatGPT Review 1 due**

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 4
* McConnaughey, Corrine. "Forget Susan B. Anthony." The Monkey Cage, March 31, 2014. (Link).
* Corder, J. Kevin, and Christina Wolbrecht. "The Impact of the 19th Amendment." Mischiefs of Faction, August 26, 2020. (Link).
* OPTIONAL:
  · Sullivan, Andrew. "Here Comes the Groom." *The New Republic*, August 28, 1989 (Link).
  · Bouie, Jamelle. "Making Voting Constitutional." *The American Prospect*, January 30, 2013 (Link).

Part 2: Institutions

- Week 6 (October 1/3): Congress

  – October 1: **ChatGPT Review 2 posted**

  * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 6
  * Glassman, Matt. "You don't hate Congress. You hate losing." Matt's Five Points, May 16, 2024. (Link).

  – October 3:

  * Lee, Frances. 2016. *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*, Chapters 2 and 3
  * Furnas, Alexander, and Timothy LaPira. "Congressional Brain Drain: Legislative Capacity in the 21st Century." New America Foundation, September 8, 2020. (Link).

- Week 7 (October 8/10): The Executive Branch (Presidency)

  – October 8:

  * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 7
  * Neustadt, Richard. 1960. *Presidential Power: The Power of Leadership*, Chapter 2
  * (LISTEN) Farewell Address, Dwight Eisenhower. January 17, 1961. (Link).

  – October 10:

  * Moe, Terry, and William Howell. "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 850-873.

  * (LISTEN) "Joe Biden and the Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency." ([Link](#)).

- Week 8 (October 15/17): The Executive Branch (Bureaucracy)

  – October 15: No class (Fall break)
  – October 17:
    * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 8
    * Fremstad, Shawn. "The official U.S. poverty rate is based on a hopelessly out-of-date metric." *Washington Post*, September 16, 2019. (Archived PDF on Canvas)
    * Sholes, Colin. "The End of Spam." Sherwood, July 30, 2024. ([Link](#)).
    * Rutherford, Fiona. "Why the US Has Fewer Sunscreen Options Than Europe." Bloomberg, June 23, 2022. ([Link](#)).
    * (LISTEN) The scourge of the "time tax." *The Weeds*. May 17, 2022. ([Link](#)).

- Week 9 (October 22/24): The Judiciary

  – October 22: **ChatGPT Review 2 due**
    * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 9
    * Brennan, William. 1985. "The Constitution of the United States: Contemporary Ratification."
    * Scalia, Antonin. 1988. "Originalism: The Lesser Evil."
  – October 24:
    * Lemley, Michael. 2022. "The Imperial Supreme Court." *Harvard Law Review* 136: 97-118.
    * Biskupic, Joan. "A secret deal between Justices John Roberts and Anthony Kennedy on gay rights and what it means today." CNN, March 30, 2023 ([Link](#)).

Part 3: The Public

- Week 10 (October 29/31): Elections

  – October 29: **ChatGPT Review 3 posted**
    * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 11
    * Popkin, Samuel. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter*, pages 1-17
  – October 31:
    * Vavreck, Lynn. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*, Chapters 2 and 3
    * (LISTEN) "Did Americans' Racial Attitudes Elect Trump?" Science of Politics podcast, February 23 2022. ([Link](#)).

- Week 11 (November 5/7): Public Opinion

  – November 5 (Election Day):
    * *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 10

* Cohn, Nate. "We Gave Four Good Pollsters the Same Raw Data. They Had Four Different Results." *New York Times*, The Upshot, September 20, 2016 (Link).
* (LISTEN) "How Does the Public Move Right When Policy Moves Left?" Science of Politics podcast, February 23 2022. (Link).

– November 7:

* Ahler, Douglas, and David Broockman. "The Delegate Paradox: Why Polarized Politicians Can Represent Citizens Best." *Journal of Politics* 80(4): 1117–1133.
* Groenendyk, Eric, Erik Kimbrough, and Mark Pickup. 2022. "How Norms Shape the Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *American Journal of Political Science* 67(3): 623-638.

- Week 12 (November 12/14): Political Parties

– November 12:

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 12
* Bawn, Kathleen, et al. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10(3): 571-597.

– November 14:

* Ziblatt, Daniel, and Steven Levitsky. 2018. *How Democracies Die*, Chapters 2 and 3
* Yglesias, Matthew. "How to fix presidential primaries: Some lessons from the 2024 good vibes non-primary." Slow Boring, July 31, 2024. (Link).

- Week 13 (November 19/21): Interest Groups

– November 19:

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 13
* Baylor, Christopher. 2013. "First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940–1960." *Studies in American Political Development* 27: 111–141.
* Della Costa, Anna Maria, and Vaughan, Dawn Baumgartner. "Who decides when kids start school? Some NC districts are in open revolt." *Durham Herald-Sun*, August 16, 2023. (Link).

– November 21:

* Han, Hahrie. "Want Gun Control? Learn from the NRA." *New York Times*, October 4, 2017. (Archived PDF posted on Canvas).
* Skocpol, Theda. "The Narrowing of Civic Life." *The American Prospect*, May 17, 2004. (Link).
* (WATCH) "United in Anger: A History of ACT UP" (Link).

- Week 14 (November 26/28): No class (Thanksgiving Break 11/26-12/2)

- Week 15 (December 3/5): The Media

– December 3:

* *Logic of American Politics*, Chapter 14
* Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3): 577-592.

– December 5: **ChatGPT Review 3 due**

* Hopkins, Daniel. "All Politics is National Because All Media is National." *FiveThirtyEight*, Jun 6, 2018. (Link).
* Darr, Joshua. "Local News Coverage Is Declining — And That Could Be Bad For American Politics." *FiveThirtyEight*, June 2, 2021. (Link).

Course Policies

Attendance

You are expected to attend class and be prepared to engage with the course material (see the Evaluation section). Excused absences must be requested in writing with reasonable advance notice. Duke policies outline personal emergencies, illnesses, varsity athletic competition, and religious observances as acceptable reasons for an excused absence, and I am willing to consider additional reasons that do not fall neatly into these categories.

In addition to excused absences, you are allowed one unexcused absence for lecture and one unexcused absence for discussion section. These are designed to give you flexibility in cases where you have a reason to miss class that wouldn't otherwise be excused – if excused absences are analogous to "sick days," this unexcused absence is your "vacation day." Maybe there's an interesting speaker on campus whose talk conflicts with class. Maybe your club is going on a trip. Maybe you need to study for a test or finish a project for another class. *Maybe you just need some rest*. Whether and how to use this flexibility is entirely up to you.

Deadlines and Late Work

Assignment due dates for this class are set where they are for a reason, and you are expected to turn assignments in on time. However, things happen, and there may be good reasons why you need to move a deadline. These reasons can range from serious unexpected circumstances to simply having a lot of other work for other classes due at the same time. Extensions must be requested in writing and, as with attendance, there is an inverse relationship between how urgent your reason is and how much advance notice I need. If you know a due date conflicts with work for another class well in advance, I'd ask that you don't wait until the day before that due date to request an extension. **Written assignments turned in after a deadline (original or extended) will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for every day they are late**. So for instance, if a deadline is 5:00pm on a Thursday, an assignment turned in at 5:01pm on that Thursday that would otherwise receive an A will receive an A-; if it is turned in at 5:01pm the next day, it will receive a B+; and so on.

Class Discussions

When you enroll in this class, you become colleagues with everyone else who is enrolled in it. Colleagues frequently disagree, but they do so without being disagreeable.

You are expected to engage with each others' views and perspectives respectfully both inside and outside of the classroom. Even (especially) when you disagree, it is essential to approach this disagreement amicably, with an assumption of good faith, because you are colleagues and not opponents.

Of course it should go without saying, but assumptions of good faith and expectations of mutual respect are not licenses to engage in exclusionary language that is inherently disrespectful.

Grading

If you feel that a grade you receive on an assignment does not reflect the quality of the work you submitted, you may email me to request either a clarification or a re-grade. The email must include, either in the body or as an attachment, a rationale for why the request is warranted. This means explicitly engaging with any substantive feedback you received and, if requesting a regrade, making a case (with reference to any provided grading criteria, such as a rubric) why the grade you received does not align with that substantive feedback.

Re-grades will begin from scratch, without reference to the original grade. This means that the new grade may be higher than, the same as, *or lower than* the original grade.

Writing

Written work should be proofread for spelling and grammar, arguments should be supported by reliable evidence, and all references must be appropriately cited. *I do not care what citation format you use as long as you pick one and use it consistently.* Even if you don't find that you need one for this course, I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with a citation management tool – my personal recommendation would be Zotero because it's free and easily integrates with Microsoft Word and Google Docs – that will make this easier when you need to compile a bibliography. You are also welcome to consult myself or the University's writing center for general writing advice.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is when you present someone else's ideas as your own. Students are strongly encouraged to learn from one another through discussions both in and outside of class, so long as individual writing assignments reflect their own intellectual labor. This means that when you submit work with your name on it and no one else's, you did the work that produced the document. All ideas and claims included in written work that are not your own should be appropriately cited.

You may use large language models such as ChatGPT in this class, provided that you disclose how you used them to *aid* your work rather than *replace* it. Presenting model-generated text as

your own writing will be considered academic dishonesty, and the writing assignments for this course are structured to generally discourage their use in the first place. There are two reasons for this. First, you are not learning how to develop, refine, or communicate ideas if you delegate these tasks to a language model. Second, because these models are not in fact intelligent, and instead generate predictions of what the text they are asked to produce might resemble, they have a tendency to *make things up* when given more complex tasks such as college-level writing assignments. You can read more about these issues here.

Duke takes the issue of academic honesty very seriously. Any student who appears to violate the University's Academic Dishonesty Policy may be referred to the University's Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. Academic dishonesty on any aspect of course work will result in failure of the course.

Support Services

Academic Support Services

Political Science Librarian: Ryan Denniston (ryan.denniston@duke.edu) is Duke's librarian for Public Policy and Political Science. In addition to myself, you are welcome to email Ryan with questions as you working on writing assignments for the course.

The Writing Studio: I encourage you to visit the Writing Studio where you will find a place beyond our classroom to work collaboratively with an attentive, non-evaluative reader. You can visit at any stage in your writing process, including before you have even started writing. Visit http://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio to schedule a face-to-face or online appointment and to learn more about Studio resources.

The Academic Resource Center: The ARC provides academic support and programming for all Duke undergraduates. Their services include one-on-one consultations and peer tutoring, and they work alongside the Student Disability Access Office to serve students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Their programs include opportunities for students to study together in structured groups ("learning communities"), as well as workshops offered throughout the semester. Further information and resources are available on their website.

Accommodation and Inclusion

Student Disability Access Office: If you have any physical, cognitive, or psychiatric needs that require accommodations for this course, please contact the Student Disability Access Office (if you haven't already) as soon as possible. The SDAO will work with you to determine appropriate accommodations. Please contact them by email at sdao@duke.edu or visit https://access.duke.edu/students for more information.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): Each of you will face some level of challenge during your time at Duke – whether it be a challenge like procrastination, or a more profound challenge that impairs your ability to function. The CAPS staff includes psychologists, clinical social workers, and psychiatrists experienced in working with college-age adults. Information

about their services and workshops is available here.

The Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity: This center provides education, advocacy, support, mentoring, academic engagement, and space LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty at Duke. The Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity also serves and supports Duke alumni/ae and the greater LGBTQIA+ community. Further information and resources are available on their website.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects individuals from sex or gender-based discrimination, including discrimination based on gender-identity, in educational programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. It applies to all aspects of employment and education programs and activities at Duke University.

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, options a complete list of confidential and non-confidential reporting options and resources both on- and off-campus can be found on the Office of Institutional Equity's website. Faculty members and instructors are considered "responsible employees" at Duke University, meaning they are required to report all allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination.

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