

SYLLABUS
PLSC 101.001: Introduction to American Politics
Loyola University Chicago
Fall 2018

MWF 8:15 am – 9:05 am
Mundelein 204

Instructor

Dr. Eric Hansen
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Office Location: Coffey Hall 326B
Office Hours: MWF 9:15 am - 10:15 am; or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

Over several decades, public opinion polls in the U.S. have recorded a decline in public trust in political institutions and elected officials. Americans are much more likely to report today than 50 years that they believe the country is “on the wrong track.” The bitter presidential campaign of 2016 and the unconventional presidency of Donald Trump have done nothing to reverse these trends. Why are our politics heading in this direction? And what can we do to create a more just, responsive, and civil political system?

This course introduces students to the contemporary practice of American politics. Students will gain the fundamental tools to understand our political system, grapple with its inconsistencies and shortcomings, and engage with the system to work toward creating positive change. The guiding theme for the course is the understanding of politics as a means to resolve collective dilemmas. Social living requires collective action and coordination. Politics are the way that we work together to distribute resources, resolve disputes, and improve human welfare.

Now that I’ve described what this course is, a quick note on what it isn’t. This class is not a venue to learn about or debate current events. Rather, this class will teach students to observe and analyze the American political system, to whatever extent possible, *objectively*.

Students who complete this course will:

- 1) Understand the fundamentals of American political institutions.
- 2) Learn to think critically about how elected officials, activists, family and friends, and students themselves make political decisions.
- 3) Gain skills in communicating effectively and civilly with peers and with people with whom they disagree
- 4) Develop skills in articulating and expressing their thoughts through speaking and writing.

Required Texts

Kollman, Ken. 2017. *The American Political System* (3rd Ed.). New York: Norton. [Core Edition]

Grades

Final grades for the course will be based on the following scale. I reserve the right to make adjustments to individual grades based on overall performance in the course and/or extenuating circumstances. I will not provide individual opportunities to earn extra credit.

Letter Grade	Percentage Score
A	93-100
A-	90-92.99
B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99
B-	80-82.99
C+	77-79.99
C	73-76.99
C-	70-72.99
D+	67-69.99
D	63-66.99
D-	60-62.99
F	59.99 or below

The proportion of each assignment as part of your overall grade is as follows:

Participation: 15%

Podcast: 30%

Quizzes: 30%

Final Exam: 25%

I update grades as the semester progresses. Students may check their current grades anytime by logging on to the Sakai gradebook. I also report both midterm and final grades in LOCUS. Midterm grades will be reported no later than the ninth week of the semester so that students with grades of C- or lower can make an informed decision of whether to withdraw from the class. The last day to withdraw with a W falls on the tenth week of the semester. Refer to the LUC academic calendar online (<http://www.luc.edu/academics/schedules>) for the exact day for specific dates.

Participation

Students are expected to participate in activities and in-class discussions of the course material. I will assess students based on the frequency of contributions, the relevance and insightfulness of the contributions in discussions, and active contributions to group work. Quality of participation can make up for a lack of frequency. Please note that attendance is an integral part of discussions. Though there is no formal attendance requirement, but you can't join the conversation if you don't show up.

Podcast

Students will work in groups of four to write and produce a 10-minute long podcast. The subject of the podcast will be students gathering information on a political opinion about a public policy

that is different from their own opinion. The creation of the podcast will follow several steps. The due dates and grade proportions for the podcast assignment for each step are listed below:

Story Proposal: 10% (due 9/14)

Script: 25% (due 10/15)

Final podcast: 50% (due 11/19)

Peer assessment and self-reflection: 15% (due 12/3)

A guide for creating the podcasts, as well as a rubric for their evaluation, will be posted on Sakai and distributed to students during the first week of class. Students should refer to the guide for more detailed instructions about the assignment.

Quizzes

There will be two quizzes administered over the course of the semester, each worth 15% of the course grade. Each quiz will consist of 40 multiple choice questions. Each quiz will test students on the curriculum from the following units:

Quiz 1 (10/12): Introduction, Constitution, Federalism, Civil Rights, Congress, Presidency

Quiz 2 (11/14): Bureaucracy, Courts, Public Opinion, Participation, Interest Groups

Final Exam

The final exam is worth 25% of students' grades. The final exam is cumulative—in other words, students should study by reviewing all material taught over the course of the semester. It will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. In line with university policy, I will administer the final exam schedule only on the date and time listed on the university calendar. I will not offer make-ups of the final exam unless the student has petitioned their dean's office for a change in exam time.

Punctuality

I will begin class promptly at our designated meeting time. Consequently, it is in students' best interest to arrive five minutes before class begins, in order to find a seat, prepare materials, review notes, etc. Getting to class ahead of time is also a courtesy to other students, who may become distracted by late arrivers. Students who must routinely arrive late due to circumstances outside their control (for example, a class immediately before mine on the opposite side of campus) should inform me at the beginning of the semester.

Communication, Office Hours, Question about Grades

Please direct all communication with me outside class or office hours through my campus email account, which can be found in the header of this syllabus. I check my campus email account several times daily and will try to reply to student emails as quickly as possible. That being said, students should not necessarily expect me to reply immediately to emails sent to me at the last minute. I may not be able to reply to questions about course material the morning of an exam or provide resources for an assignment the night before it is to be turned in.

My office hours exist solely for you to visit me with questions about this class. If you can't make those times, email me to schedule a more convenient appointment time. Email is only for brief

communications. If you have long and complicated questions, come to my office hours. I will not send grades over email—check Sakai for the latest updates. After I have graded and returned your assignments, there is a 24-hour moratorium before I will answer questions about that assignment.

Technology Use

I will not allow the use of computers, tablets, or other electronic devices during class. There may be some days when I will ask you to bring a computer with you (if there is an online activity, for example). Most of class time will involve lecture or discussion of articles and concepts related to the course—this can be accomplished without computers.

The use of cell phones or other mobile communication devices is strictly prohibited during class, except in the event of an emergency. Cell phones minimally should be put on silent but preferably should be turned off. Students discovered using their phones during class time will be asked to turn off their phones and place them out of reach.

Students with Disabilities

Loyola University provides reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD), located in Sullivan Center, Suite 117. Students should provide me with an accommodation notification from SSWD, preferably within the first two weeks of class. Students are encouraged to meet with me individually in order to discuss their accommodations. All information will remain confidential. For more information or further assistance, please call (773) 508-3700 or visit <http://www.luc.edu/sswd>.

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for adhering to university policy on academic honesty and avoiding acts of plagiarism or cheating. Students can find more information about what constitutes plagiarism at the Writing Center's website: (<http://www.luc.edu/writing/studentresources/onlineresources>). Consult the College of Arts and Sciences' statement to learn more about college policy: (<http://www.luc.edu/cas/advising/academicintegritystatement>). I reserve the right to exercise case-by-case discretion in assigning penalties for acts of academic dishonesty. Generally speaking, however, students should expect to receive a score of "0" on any assignment or exam where they are observed plagiarizing, cheating, or passing off someone else's ideas as their own. If more than one instance occurs during the semester, offending students should expect to fail my course. I report all acts of academic dishonesty to the Dean of College of Arts and Science's office.

A Note on Civility

I expect students enrolled in my class to converse with one another civilly. Political discussions are often controversial—many issues affect us on a personal level. However, this class provides an opportunity for students to practice talking about politics in a public setting, especially with people they disagree with. Engaging in civil discourse is a necessary skill for participating in democracy and for living and working in a diverse society.

Readings

Students are expected to complete daily reading assignments in preparation for class. The assigned reading may be a book chapter or an article from a mainstream news source. Read carefully and be ready to discuss the material, as discussions based around these readings will form the basis of the participation component of your grade. I reserve the right to make changes to the reading list and will inform students well in advance of any changes.

All reading assignments are to be completed by the beginning of class on the day the assignment is listed. Students are responsible for obtaining their own copies of the Kollman textbook. All other chapters and articles will be posted on Sakai. Students may not share course materials with others outside of the class without my written permission.

<i>August</i>	
August 27 Introductions, course overview.	Read the course syllabus
August 29 & 31	NO CLASS – Dr. Hansen out of town at conference
<i>September</i>	
September 3	NO CLASS – Labor Day
September 5 Foundations of Politics	Read Kollman, Ch. 1
September 7 Constitution	Read Kollman Ch. 2
September 10 Constitution	Read “The 4 Types of Constitutional Crises,” <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>
September 12 Federalism	Read Kollman Ch. 3
September 14 Federalism	Podcast Story Proposal Due
September 17 Civil Rights and Liberties	Read Kollman Ch. 4
September 19 Civil Rights and Liberties	Read “Why Even Nazis Deserve Free Speech,” <i>Politico</i>
September 21 Congress	Read Kollman Ch. 5
September 24 Congress	Listen “Why Can’t We Just Burn Gerrymandering to the Ground?” <i>FiveThirtyEight</i>
September 26 Congress	Read “Help, We’re in a Living Hell and Don’t Know How to Get Out,” <i>Esquire</i>
September 28 Congress	Read “Senate Republicans Deploy ‘Nuclear Option’ to Clear Path for Gorsuch,” <i>New York Times</i>

<i>October</i>	
October 1 Presidency	Read Kollman Ch. 6
October 3 Presidency	Read “Barack Obama and Doris Kearns Goodwin: The Ultimate Exit Interview,” <i>Vanity Fair</i>
October 5 Presidency	Read “For Trump, A Year of Reinventing the Presidency,” <i>New York Times</i>
October 8	NO CLASS – Fall Break
October 10 Bureaucracy	Read Kollman Ch. 7
October 12	QUIZ #1
October 15 Bureaucracy	Podcast Script Due
October 17 Courts	Read Kollman Ch. 8
October 19 Courts	Read “How Conservatives Won the Battle Over the Courts,” <i>The Atlantic</i>
October 22 Courts	Read “The Anti-Court Court,” <i>New York Review of Books</i>
October 24 Public Opinion	Read Kollman Ch. 9
October 26 Public Opinion	Read “Politics and the New Machine,” <i>The New Yorker</i>
October 29 Public Opinion	Read “The Meaning of Trump’s Election Has Been Exaggerated,” <i>RealClear Politics</i>
October 31 Public Opinion	Read “This Article Won’t Change Your Mind,” <i>The Atlantic</i>
<i>November</i>	
November 2 Participation	Read Kollman Ch. 10
November 5 Participation	Read “The Most Dangerous Hobby,” <i>Boston Globe</i>
November 7 Interest Groups	Read Kollman Ch. 11
November 9 Interest Groups	Read “How Much Has <i>Citizens United</i> Changed the Political Game?” <i>New York Times Magazine</i>
November 12 Parties	Read Kollman Ch. 12
November 14	QUIZ #2
November 16 Parties	Read “What’s Wrong with the Democrats?” <i>The Atlantic</i>

November 19 Parties	Final Podcast Due
November 21 – 23	NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break
November 26 Elections	Read Kollman Ch. 13
November 28 Elections	Read “The Weasel, Twelve Monkeys, and the Shrub,” <i>Rolling Stone</i> , p. 1-11 only
November 30 Elections	Read “The Weasel, Twelve Monkeys, and the Shrub,” <i>Rolling Stone</i> , p. 12-22 only
December 3 Media	Read Kollman Ch. 14 Podcast Assessment Due
December 5 Media	Read “Trump’s Fake War on the Fake News,” <i>Politico</i>
December 7 Wrap-up & Review	Bring review questions for final exam
December 13	Final Exam – 9:00 am

Changes to the Syllabus

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. If changes are made, students will be informed through email and verbally in class, and a new syllabus document will be posted on Sakai.