

SYLLABUS
PLSC 101: American Politics
Loyola University Chicago
Fall 2024

MWF 2:45 – 3:35 pm
Mundelein 406

Instructor

Dr. Eric Hansen

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Office Location: Coffey Hall 325

Office Hours: Monday, 3:45-4:45 pm; Wednesday & Friday, 1:30-2:30 pm; 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 ago that they believe the country is “on the wrong track.” Why are U.S. politics headed in that direction? What can we do to create a more just and responsive 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.

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

When you complete this course successfully, you will be able to:

1. Understand the structures and functions of American political institutions.
2. Recognize and appreciate the influence of cultural, social, and historical contexts on political behavior, institutions, and policies in the United States.
3. Characterize the roots of enduring political disagreements and debates.
4. Apply political theories and concepts when interpreting current events.

Required Texts

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2023. *The Logic of American Politics*. 11th ed. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Recommended Texts

I recommend students read a daily, national newspaper while enrolled in this course (though it’s also a good practice afterwards!). Student digital subscriptions to the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* are available for free through LUC Libraries.

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. There will be **NO** extra credit provided.

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	60-66.99
F	59.99 or below

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

Movie Response Paper: 5%

Participation: 25%

Quizzes: 45% (15% each)

Final Exam: 25%

Movie Response Paper

Early in the semester, you will watch *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1941). The film is available to stream for free online through LUC Libraries (search for it in the online catalog) and on many streaming services.

Then submit an essay to Sakai that responds to *one* of the following questions. The essay should be 500-750 words, not including headers or references.

1. Discuss the central themes of the movie. What messages does the film convey about American politics? How are these messages relevant to contemporary political issues?
2. Discuss the theme of power and corruption as depicted in the movie. How do characters gain, wield, and abuse power? What does the film suggest about the relationship between power and corruption in American politics?
3. Discuss the portrayal of leadership and governance in the movie. How are leaders depicted in terms of their decision-making, integrity, and effectiveness? What lessons can be drawn about the qualities of good political leadership?
4. Discuss how the movie fits with your preconceptions of American politics. In what ways does it support what you already think about politics? In what ways does it challenge your views?

If and only if you have seen *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* multiple times before, you may petition Dr. Hansen to watch an alternate movie about American politics for your essay.

Participation

Participation is worth 25% of your overall course grade. Students are expected to participate in activities and in-class discussions of the course material. Though there is no formal attendance requirement, attendance is an integral part of participation. You can't join the conversation if you don't show up!

Quizzes

There will be three quizzes during the semester, each worth 20% of the course grade. Quizzes will test students on the material on the following material:

Quiz 1: Introduction, Constitution, Federalism, Civil Rights, Civil Liberties

Quiz 2: Congress, Presidency, Bureaucracy, Judiciary

Quiz 3: Public Opinion; Voting, Campaigns and Elections; Political Parties; Interest Groups; Media

All quizzes are multiple choice and will be administered online on Sakai during scheduled course meetings. A student who cannot take the quiz at the scheduled time should make every effort to reschedule *in advance*. If a student asks to reschedule at any time after 12:00 am the day of the exam/quiz, I will allow a makeup exam with a 10-point (out of 100) grade penalty. I do not request or accept doctors' notes. I understand students must sometimes miss class for reasons outside their control, which is why the no-notice rescheduling penalty is small.

Final Exam

The final exam will cover the cumulative material throughout the semester. It will be offered on Sakai and consist of a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. I will not offer the final exam at any time besides the time listed below unless the student has petitioned their dean's office for a change in exam time.

A Note on Punctuality

I will begin class promptly at our designated meeting time. Students should arrive five minutes before class begins to find a seat and make any preparations of materials before class starts. 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 Water Tower 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. 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 the Sakai Gradebook 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. I will only allow computers in class if the student presents a notice of accommodations from SAC.

The use of cell phones or other mobile communication devices is 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.

Student Accessibility

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 Students Accessibility Center (SAC), located in Sullivan Center, Suite 117. Students should provide me with an accommodation notification from SAC, 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/sac>.

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 case-by-case discretion in assigning penalties for acts of academic dishonesty. 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 a student commits more than one act of academic dishonesty during the semester, I will fail that student in the course. I report all instances of academic dishonesty to the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Science.

Statement on AI Use

The purpose of this class is for students to develop their individual ability to think critically, comprehend, and write about American Politics. That can only be achieved through personal engagement with ideas and material. Therefore, students may not use artificial intelligence (AI) to generate ideas or create text for any written assignments in this class. Students suspected of

using ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, or any similar services to complete their written assignments will be subject to the sanctions described in the previous section.

Readings

Students are expected to complete weekly reading assignments in preparation for class. Students should read carefully and be ready to discuss the material, as discussions based around these readings will form the basis of the participation 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 the first class for the week it is assigned. Students are responsible for understanding the material from the assigned readings for the quizzes and final exams. Students may not share course materials with others outside of the class without my written permission.

<i>August</i>	
August 26 Introductions	Read the course syllabus
August 28 Foundations of Politics	Read Kernell Ch. 1
August 30 Myths of American Politics	NO CLASS Watch <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> on your own time
<i>September</i>	
September 2	NO CLASS – Labor Day
September 4 Constitution	Read Kernell Ch. 2
September 6 Constitution	No reading assignment Movie Response Paper Due to Sakai
September 9 Civic Engagement	Meet Austrian Young Leaders Delegation (2:30 pm, Corboy Law 207)
September 12 Federalism	Read Kernell Ch. 3
September 14 Federalism	No reading assignment
September 16 Civil Rights	Read Kernell Ch. 4 & 5
September 18 Civil Liberties	No reading assignment
September 20 Congress	Read Kernell Ch. 6
September 23 Congress	No reading assignment
September 25 Congress	No reading assignment

September 27	QUIZ 1
<i>October</i>	
September 30 Presidency	Read Kernell Ch. 7
October 2 Presidency	No reading assignment
October 4 Presidency	No reading assignment
October 7	NO CLASS – Fall Break
October 9 Bureaucracy	Read Kernell Ch.8
October 11 Bureaucracy	No reading assignment
October 14 Judiciary	Read Kernell Ch. 9
October 16 Judiciary	No reading assignment
October 18 Judiciary	No reading assignment
October 21 Public Opinion	Read Kernell Ch. 10
October 23 Public Opinion	No reading assignment
October 25	QUIZ 2
October 28 Public Opinion	No reading assignment
October 30 Voting, Campaigns and Elections	Read Kernell Ch. 11
November 1 Voting, Campaigns and Elections	No reading assignment
<i>November</i>	
November 4 Voting, Campaigns and Elections	No reading assignment
November 6 Political Parties	Read Kernell Ch. 12
November 8 Political Parties	No reading assignment
November 11 Political Parties	No reading assignment
November 13 Interest Groups	Read Kernell Ch. 13

November 15 Interest Groups	No reading assignment
November 18 Media	Read Kernell Ch. 14
November 20 Media	No reading assignment
November 22 Media	No reading assignment
November 25	QUIZ 3
November 27-29	NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break
December 2 Wrap-up	Read Kollman Ch. 15
December 4 TBD	No reading assignment
December 6 Review	No reading assignment
December 13	Final Exam – 4:15 pm

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.