Instructor
Dr. Eric Hansen
Email: ehansen4@luc.edu
Office Location: Coffey Hall 325
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:45 – 5:45 pm; Fridays, 1:30 – 2:30 pm; or by appointment

Course Description and Objectives
This seminar covers political institutions in the United States. American institutions include not only the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government, but also state and local governments; intermediary institutions like parties, interest groups, and media organizations; and grassroots-level institutions like civic organizations and democratic norms. Institutions create incentives for citizens and elites to take some political actions and avoid taking others. However, institutions are far from immutable—they persist as long as they allow the political actors working within them to achieve their underlying objectives. We start small, studying the institutions that citizens encounter in their day-to-day lives, and work our way up to national governing institutions.

The primary objective of the class is for students to gain skills and confidence in interpreting and critiquing academic literature on American political institutions. By successfully completing the class, students should be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of research across a variety of subjects. They should also be able to apply lessons from this substantive body of work to their own research interests. Other relevant readings will appear under the “recommended” readings each week as a resource for students to reference outside of our class discussions.

Required Texts
We will read the following book in its entirety:


Optional Texts
We will read excerpts from the following books. Scanned copies of reading selections will be posted on Sakai, but students may wish to obtain their own copies.

- Alexis de Tocqueville. 1840. Democracy in America.

Background Text
This class assumes background knowledge of American government at the level of an introductory college course. If you are unfamiliar with the mechanics of American government, I recommend you read an introductory textbook alongside the assigned readings for class. There are many textbooks online for free or available at the library. Commonly assigned texts include We the People, American Government: A Brief Introduction, and The American Political System, but any book from a major academic publisher will do.

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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92.99</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62.99</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59.99 or below</td>
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The proportion of each assignment as part of your overall grade is as follows:

Participation: 30%
Discussion Questions: 20%
Enrichment Assignment: 20%
Final Reflection Paper: 30%

Participation
This seminar requires active participation from students every class period. There may be some days when I prepare a short lecture, but we will spend a vast majority of our time discussing the assigned reading. To spare us from awkwardly sitting in silence, students should prepare by (a) actively reading the assigned material (i.e. reading in a low-distraction environment, taking notes
while reading) and (b) coming to class prepared to ask questions—even if those questions are to clarify the reading. Active participation in the discussions will account for 30% of the grade. I reserve the right to ask students to start preparing small assignments about the reading before class to count towards the participation grade if discussion lags in class.

**Discussion Questions**

To help students prepare for discussion and to add some structure to the reading, **all students must submit three (3) discussion questions about the day’s reading to Sakai by 9 pm the night before the class meeting** (i.e. Tuesday nights). Students should submit them under the appropriate day’s thread in the “Discussion” tab on the class Sakai site. I will incorporate the questions into that week’s lesson plans. I will grade discussion questions on the quality of the question and the timeliness of submission. Discussion questions are worth 20% of the class grade.

Discussion questions should be open-ended and allow for disagreement and extended dialogue among seminar participants.

Examples of good discussion questions:

- **Theoretical questions**
  - Why does the author think that democratic nations are less likely to go to war? What are other potential explanations?

- **Methodological questions**
  - Why do you think the author chose this method to provide evidence? What other research design(s) could the author have used?

- **Critiques**
  - What problems do you see in the author’s use of an online survey sample?

Examples of bad discussion questions:

- **Factual questions**
  - Where did the author conduct the field experiment?

- **Yes or no questions**
  - Did the author use multinomial regression to test the hypothesis?

**Enrichment Assignment**

Students will complete one of two assignments intended to enhance their understanding of the material outside the assigned reading assignments.

**MA Students – Book Report**

Students will read an outside book in its entirety and present the findings to the class. The outside book must be on the topic of American political institutions. Send me an email telling me which book you plan to read no later than February 15 so I can approve it. Feel free to use books from the recommended reading list below. Because books are being presented to the class, I will not allow more than one student to present on any one book.
Students will sign up for presentation days early in the semester. No students will be required to present before Spring Break, but students may request to present it early in the semester.

Presentations should last about 15 minutes and should include a slide deck. Presentations should both summarize and analyze the book. All presentations should include the following element:

- **Summary**
  - Research question(s)
  - Theory
  - Data/Methods
  - Findings
  - Conclusions/Implications/Discussion

- **Original critique**
  - Strengths of book (What does the book teach us?)
  - Weaknesses of book (Unanswered questions? Unfounded conclusions? Etc.)

The presentation should be 2/3 summary of the book to the class (10 minutes) and 1/3 original critique of the book (5 minutes). Presentations will be timed; I will interrupt and stop presentations at 18 minutes.

**Ph.D. Students – Replication Paper**

Ph.D. students should replicate and extend an empirical paper about American political institutions published in the last ten years. Students should download replication data from the authors’ personal website, journal’s dataverse, or other source. The paper should offer a critique of the original paper and propose an extension of the paper that addresses the critique (e.g. uses a different model specification, different data set, adds a control or interaction term, etc.). The paper should include the following elements:

- A summary of the original paper. Brief, but enough background for your readers to understand what you’re adding.
- Your critique of the paper
- Your proposed solution for addressing the critique
- Justification for why the solution is important or necessary
- Presentation of the results. Ideally, a side-by-side comparison of the original results to your results in the same table or figure.
- Brief discussion or conclusion

Papers should be roughly ten pages in length and use APSA format. Please refer to the “Replication Paper” folder under “Resources” in Sakai for ideas and examples of published replication papers.

Note: with my permission, MA students who have taken PLSC 475 may also complete a replication paper instead of a book report.
Final Reflection Paper
Students should submit an eight-page paper responding to this prompt:

*Americans’ trust in political institutions has been declining for decades. Are they right to mistrust our institutions? Why or why not?*

There’s no “right” answer. Rather, I’ll be assessing the quality of the argumentation, including the evidence you marshal in support of your argument. The reflection papers should contain the following elements:

- An original argument responding to the prompt with a thesis clearly stated in the first paragraph.
- Citations to assigned material from at least four different weeks of the class. (In other words, you should discuss at least four different political institutions in the paper.)
- Citations to at least two in-class discussions. (In a footnote in the paper, include the class date and any speakers/participants in the discussions you’re citing.)

Papers should be double-spaced and written in 12-pt Times New Roman font. The citations should follow APSA format.

Summary of Assignment Deadlines

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Where to Submit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Questions</td>
<td>24 hours before each class meeting (Tuesdays at 9 pm)</td>
<td>Sakai Discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book Report (MAs only)</td>
<td>Sign up for a presentation day</td>
<td>In-class presentation. Email the slide deck to <a href="mailto:ehansen4@luc.edu">ehansen4@luc.edu</a> at least 15 minutes before class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication Paper (Ph.D.s only)</td>
<td>Monday, April 15, 9 pm</td>
<td>Sakai Assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Paper</td>
<td>Wednesday, May 1, 9 pm</td>
<td>Sakai Assignments</td>
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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 writing assignments 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. 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 allow the use of laptops, tablets, or other devices in class. However, if I suspect that devices are being used for purposes other than a resource to further discussion or take notes, I reserve the right to curtail or prohibit their use in class. 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 Chicago 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 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 political institutions. 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. 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 books by Skocpol, Hall, and Lee. 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.

January 17: Introduction and Attitudes towards Institutions

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


January 24: Civil Society

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**January 31: Interest Groups**

*Required Readings*


*Recommended Readings*

• Richard Hall and Alan Deardorff. 2006. “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy.” *APSR* 100: 69-84.
February 7: State & Local Politics I

Required Reading


Recommended Readings


February 14: State & Local Politics II

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


**February 21: Media**

*Required Readings*

• Timothy Cook. 1998. *Governing with the News*. Ch. 4-5

*Recommended Readings*

• James Hamilton. 2004. *All the News That’s Fit to Sell*.
• Amber Boydstun. 2013. *Making the News: Politics, the Media, and Agenda Setting*.
• Jeffrey Berry and Sarah Sobieraj. 2014. *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*.

**February 28: Political Parties**

*Required Readings*

Recommended Readings


March 6: Spring Break – No class meeting

March 13: Elections

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

• Hall, Andrew B. 2019. *Who Wants to Run?*

**March 20: Congress—the Electoral Connection and Representation**

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**

• David Canon. 1999. *Race, Redistricting, and Representation: The Unintended Consequences of Black Majority Districts*.
• Jeffrey Harden. 2015. *Multidimensional Democracy*.
• Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists*.
March 27: Congress—Internal Dynamics

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

- Laurel Harbridge. 2015. *Is Bipartisanship Dead?*
April 3: Presidency I

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Readings**


April 10: Presidency II

**Required Readings**

April 17: Bureaucracy

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


April 24: Courts

Required Readings


**Recommended Readings**

• Ryan Black and Ryan Owens. 2016. “Courting the President: How Circuit Court Judges Alter Their Behavior for Promotion to the Supreme Court.” *AJPS* 60:30-43.
• Lee Epstein and Jack Knight. 1998. *The Choices Justices Make.*
• Jeffrey A. Segal and Harold J. Spaeth. 2002. *The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited.*

**May 1: Final Exam Period, 7-9 pm**

**Disclaimer**
I reserve the right to make any changes to this syllabus as circumstances change throughout the semester. Any changes will be announced over email and, when possible, verbally in class well in advance of the changes taking effect.