

# PLSC 001H: Introduction to American National Government

Spring 2018

Tuesday/Thursday 3:05- 4:20 PM

Boucke 317

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\*Use link above for office hours appointments.

## Course Description and Goals

The principal goal of this class is to help you understand American politics as you will experience it throughout your life. We will discuss the basic structure of the government, how people participate in politics, and the institutions that connect people with their government. It is also important to know how to gather information about what the government is or is not doing, and to make sense of this. We will rely frequently on articles from media sources to apply the ideas and concepts we cover in class to contemporary politics.

A second goal is to introduce you to the practice of political science. Many of you will eventually write an honors thesis, perhaps in American politics. To that end, we will spend some time talking about what political scientists studying American politics do, the types of questions they ask, and types of methods they employ to answer those questions.

A third goal is to pose critical questions about democracy in the United States. What actions taken by government or political leaders would enhance or impede democracy? How much do elections matter? What kinds of choices are offered? How responsive is government to what the public wants? Why is it so difficult to change policy from the status quo? Are polarized parties a good thing? Who benefits when government acts or fails to act?

Finally, by the end of the course you should gain an appreciation for why the American government is setup as it is and why politics operate as they do. While there are a variety of perspectives that can be used to do this, we will focus primarily on how institutions developed and continue to structure political outcomes.

## Readings

There are two required texts for this class, both are published by W.W. Norton and available in the bookstore:

1. William Bianco and David Canon, *American Politics Today*, **5th edition, Core**. (It is very important that you purchase the Core version of the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Paperback and three-hole punch versions are available at the books store. There is also an e-book version available online.)
2. Ken Kollman, *Readings in American Politics*, **4<sup>th</sup> edition**.

Additional readings will be available on the Canvas site, via links on the syllabus, or through the Penn State Library website.

### **Quizzes**

For each assigned chapter in the textbook (Bianco and Canon's *American Politics Today*, referred to as B&C below), you will need to complete an at-home online quiz. These are accessible through a program called **InQuizitive**. Information on how to register for InQuizitive will be available on the course CANVAS page.

InQuizitive is included with purchase of the textbook. If you need to purchase a quiz code separately (20\$) use this link: <https://digital.wwnorton.com/amerpoltoday5score>

Quizzes must be completed within one week of the last date listed on the syllabus for that section of the course, but it is recommended you complete them by the day listed on the syllabus. *Late quizzes will be penalized 10 points. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped.*

### **Participation**

There are many ways to contribute to your participation grade in this class. First, you should be prepared by having completed the readings and you should participate meaningfully in class discussions, at least some of the time.

We will begin many class periods with a short writing assignment (5 minutes) based on the readings, class discussion, or current events. These are ungraded, but must be completed in class in order to receive credit.

We will often do in-class group projects and exercises. These count toward your participation Grade as well.

### **Project Assignments**

We will complete two projects during the semester. These may have some in-class work done in groups, but the final 3-5-page project must be completed individually. Each project will involve internet based research and will draw on class readings:

- Project 1: Who does what? Public policy in the states and national government. Distributed on 1/30
- Project 2: Lawmaking under unified government. Distributed on 4/10

### **Evaluation**

Quizzes	20%
Participation	15%
Two Projects	25%
Midterm	20%
Final Exam	20%

### **Laptops**

You should bring a laptop to class to use for our five-minute writing assignments. We will also use laptops for certain in-class exercises. However, **laptops are to remain closed otherwise.**

For information on borrowing a laptop from the library visit the following website:  
<https://libraries.psu.edu/services/computers-and-technology/borrow-computers-and-technology-equipment/borrow-laptop>

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.

### **Accommodations**

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit the Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines at (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

### **Counseling and Psychological Services**

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS)  
(<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>): 814-863-0395

Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses  
(<http://senate.psu.edu/faculty/counseling-services-at-commonwealth-campuses/>)

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400  
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

### **Educational Equity**

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>)

## **Course Schedule**

### **1. Building American Democracy**

1/9: Introduction

1/11: Why government?                      B&C chapter 1                                      Chapter 1 Quiz

1/16: Founding                                      B&C chapter 2, pgs. 26-34;  
Declaration of Independence

1/18: The Constitution                      Articles of Confederation;  
The U.S. Constitution

1/23: How Democratic is the              B&C remainder of chapter 2;              Chapter 2 Quiz  
Constitution?                                      Dahl, "How Democratic is  
the American Constitution?"  
(in Kollman)

1/25: Whose Constitution?              Emily Badger (NYT) "As  
American as Apple Pie? The  
Rural Voter's  
Disproportionate Slice of  
Power"; The Declaration of  
the Causes of Seceding

1/30: Federalism                                      B&C chapter 3                                      Chapter 3 Quiz

2/1: States as Laboratories of              Sabrina Tavernise (NYT),              Project 1, work day, bring  
Democracy                                      Colorado's Effort Against  
Teenage Pregnancies Is a  
Startling Success

2/6 & 2/8: Civil Liberties      B&C chapter 4; The Bill of Rights; *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) (in Kollman)      Chapter 4 Quiz

2/13 & 2/15: Civil Rights      B&C chapter 5; Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (read or listen to letter); *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (in Kollman); *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) (in Kollman)      Chapter 5 Quiz

2/20: Midterm Review

2/22: No Class

2/27: Midterm Exam

## 2. Democracy and Political Institutions

3/1: Public Opinion      B&C chapter 6; Zaller, "The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion" (in Kollman)      Chapter 6 Quiz

3/6 & 3/8: Spring Break

3/13: The Media      B&C chapter 7      Chapter 7 Quiz

3/15: Political Parties      B&C chapter 8; Angus et al., "The American Voter" (in Kollman)      Chapter 8 Quiz

3/20 & 3/22: Political Participation and Elections      B&C chapter 9; Putnam, "Bowling Alone" (in Kollman); *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder* (2013) (in Kollman); Fox and Lawless, "Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies" (in Kollman)      Chapter 9 Quiz

3/27: Interest Groups      B&C chapter 10      Chapter 10 Quiz

3/29 & 4/3: Congress and Representation      B&C chapter 11; Mayhew, "Congress: The Electoral Connection" (in Kollman);      Chapter 11 Quiz

Fenno, "Homestyle" (in Kollman); Grimmer et. al, "The Impression of Influence" (in Kollman)

4/5: No Class

4/10: Representation

Project 2, work day, bring laptops

4/12: The Presidency

B&C chapter 12

Chapter 12 Quiz

4/17: The Bureaucracy

B&C chapter 13

Chapter 13 Quiz

4/19 & 4/23: The Courts

B&C chapter 14; Rosenberg, "The Hollow Hope" (in Kollman); *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) (in Kollman); *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) (in Kollman)

4/27: The State of American Democracy and Final Exam Review

TBA

Finals Week: Final Exam