Introduction to Political Science: American Politics

Political Science 10

University of California San Diego, Summer 2020

This Version: July 30, 2020

1 Summer 2020 Digital Course Format

This syllabus reflects the current teaching and learning protocols for Summer 2020, instituted by the University in response to the ongoing Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) outbreak. These protocols necessitate the transition to a digital course format. In practice, this means:

1. We will not meet in person during the summer term,
2. Course lectures will be recorded and made available for asynchronous viewing via Canvas,
3. Written assignments will be submitted digitally through Canvas,
4. Office hours with the instructional team will take place over Zoom.

Please check Canvas frequently for announcements, as we may need to clarify certain instructions and policies, or adjust the course format in response to students’ feedback and the incredibly fluid nature of the current public health setting. Naturally, you should all feel free to reach out with questions and concerns.

It is unlikely, but not out of the realm of possibility that either you or I will fall ill during the course of the term. If you do fall ill, please keep me apprised of your situation, so that we may arrange for an incomplete or enact other policies as directed by the University and the Department of Political Science. If I fall ill, we will try our best to maintain the continuity of course by assigning an alternate instructor to facilitate class sessions. The health and safety of our students remains a priority. We will carefully monitor the COVID-19 situation, and adapt the course structure and policies as necessary to accommodate any developments and to maintain compliance with all University and departmental guidelines.

You can find the latest information and updates regarding the Novel Coronavirus at the UC San Diego Information Center. This website also contains a section on the CDC’s recommendations to help prevent the spread of viruses, such as SARS-CoV-2. If you develop symptoms consistent with the flu, or are concerned that you may have been exposed to COVID-19, please reach out to Student Health Services. Additionally, we understand that many students may be worried about the virus and the general atmosphere of uncertainty, and may experience heightened feelings of anxiety. If you would like access to counseling services, there are resources available through UC San Diego’s Counseling and Psychological Services.
2 Instructional Team

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Instructor and TA office hours by appointment.

3 Course Description

This course is intended to provide students with (1) an overview of the American political system, (2) an introduction to the institutions and behaviors studied by political scientists, and (3) examples of modern approaches to social science inquiry. We will begin the course with a brief discussion of politics and political science, and round out the first week by delving into the early history of the United States (ca. 1750–1789). The second week will focus on the Constitution, the federal structure it creates, and the rights and liberties it guarantees. In Weeks 3 and 4, we’ll take a deep dive into each of the three branches of government. Week 5 will cover elections, interest groups, and political parties. Throughout the course, we will also spend some time talking about a set of substantive issues salient to contemporary U.S. politics, including race and identity, economic inequality, immigration, populism, and the forthcoming presidential and congressional elections.

4 Assignments & Grades

4.1 Readings

The textbook for this course is *The Logic of American Politics*, 9th Edition, by Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. Hard copies and digital versions of the textbook are available for purchase or rent through the UC San Diego Bookstore and other retailers.\(^1\)

Additional readings will be posted to Canvas (under Files → Course Readings tab, but also linked in Section 6 below). These are primarily long-form journalism pieces, which occasionally have a left or right-leaning editorial bent. The idea is not to promote or condone any particular political perspective, but rather to (1) draw students’ attention to the ways in which the theoretical and substantive issues discussed in this course play out in contemporary American politics, and (2) encourage students to read credible news sources with a critical eye.

4.2 Weekly Quizzes

In lieu of a midterm or final exam, students will complete a weekly quiz covering topics from the week’s lecture and textbook readings. Each quiz will consist of between 25 and 50 multiple choice and true / false questions. The quizzes will be released to Canvas on Mondays at 9:00am, and will be due by 11:59pm the following Sunday. The

\(^1\)An eBook version of the textbook is available through Canvas during the first week of class. Beginning in Week 2, students that opt into the bookstore’s course materials program will have access to the book for $57.65 (the publisher’s list price is $125).
quizzes are timed (60 minutes), and are open book and open note, though students must complete the quizzes on their own. No group work is allowed. There is no term paper or final exam.

4.3 Grading

Your overall grade for this course is calculated as the weighted average of your five weekly quiz scores. Each quiz is worth 20% of your overall course grade.

5 Course Policies

5.1 Weekly Lectures

This course will be conducted asynchronously. Students will not be required to log into Zoom lectures at a specified time. Rather, a series of pre-recorded lectures will be posted to Canvas. These lecture clips will drop on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11:00am, which is our normally scheduled lecture time, though students are free to view them at their leisure. Lecture clips will average between 10 and 20 minutes in length, and three to five clips will be posted to Canvas each Tuesday and Thursday. See Section 6 below for a schedule of lectures.

5.2 Optional Weekly Discussion Session

While recorded lectures offer some convenience and flexibility, they also prevent engagement and dialogue between students and the instructor. To make up for this “Socratic deficit,” we will host a 30 minute Zoom session each week on Thursday at 1:00pm (beginning 6 August). This session is strictly optional, and will not contain any new lecture material. These sessions are an opportunity for students to engage directly with the course instructor, to ask questions, and to seek clarification on lectures and other course material. We can also use this forum to discuss current events and any other topics students may be interested in. I will be online for at least 30 minutes, and am happy to stay around longer if necessary. A recurring Zoom link for these sessions will be posted to Canvas.

5.3 Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is expected of all students (and faculty) at UCSD. Lying, cheating, and dishonesty will not be tolerated, as these actions undermine learning and inhibit the University’s ability to certify students’ knowledge and abilities. Thus, any attempt to enhance your grade (or anyone else’s) by lying, cheating, or dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office and will result in sanctions. Sanctions may include a failing grade in the class and suspension or dismissal from the University. You can read more about academic integrity here.

5.4 Accessibility & Accommodations

Students with disabilities may request accommodations through the Office for Students with Disabilities, located in University Center, Room 202. Students must present their “Authorization for Accommodation” letters to the course instructor and the Department of Political Science prior to the first quiz to receive accommodation. We are unable to accommodate students retroactively.
Students that require academic support should contact the UCSD Teaching + Learning Commons, which offers tutoring and group study, supplemental instruction, and writing support.2

5.5 Inclusion & Basic Needs

The University is committed to creating a learning environment that supports diversity of thought, perspective, experience, and identity. Harassment of any form will not be tolerated. Any speech or act that is blatantly or implicitly discriminatory, intimidating, or predatory will be reported to the UCSD Office of Student Conduct and/or the UCSD Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination.

Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in this course, is encouraged to contact the UC San Diego Basic Needs Center or the Triton Food Pantry. I am cognizant of the fact that the digital format for this course may impose an undue burden on some students. If you have difficulty accessing the technology necessary to participate in, or to complete this course, please reach out. I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate your particular circumstance.

5.6 Make Up Quizzes & Regrades

Make up quizzes will not be provided without a legitimate, documented excuse. However, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate students that have genuine religious conflicts with scheduled assignments.

Regrade requests must be made to the instructor in writing in a timely manner (3 days). Written regrade requests should not exceed two paragraphs, and should outline any errors that you believe occurred in the grading process. Note that regrade requests are intended to correct grading errors, not to negotiate a higher grade. When submitting work for a regrade, the entire work will be evaluated, which may result in a lower grade.

5.7 Digital Course Presence

All course materials, including lecture recordings and announcements, are available through Canvas. Additionally, office hours and meetings with the instructor or TA will utilize Zoom.

6 Lecture Schedule and Reading Assignments

This schedule is tentative, and subject to change at the instructor’s discretion. All non-textbook readings are linked below; pdf versions are available on Canvas. Also, please note that some of these lectures may be divided into multiple parts on Canvas, in an effort to keep lecture videos as short as possible.

Week 1 — Introduction & Historical Background

Readings:

1. Textbook, Chapters 1 & 2
2. The Declaration of Independence
3. The Articles of Confederation

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2Some of these resources may be unavailable during Summer Session due to disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 situation, though my understanding is that students can set up online consultations with tutors and writing consultants.


Lectures:

- **Tuesday, 4 August**
  1. Course Mechanics & Course Overview
  2. Introduction to Politics & Political Science
  3. Four Primitives
  4. Collective Action

- **Thursday, 6 August**
  1. What are Governments and What do They do?
  2. Divisions & Contention in American Politics
  3. The Road to Independence
  4. The Articles of Confederation

**Week 2 — The Constitution**

Readings:

1. Textbook, Chapters 3 – 5

2. The Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights


Lectures:

- **Tuesday, 11 August**
  1. Constitution: Bargaining
  2. Article 1
  3. Article 2
  4. Article 3
  5. Articles 4 – 7

- **Thursday, 13 August**
  1. Federalism: An Overview
  2. Federalism: California
  3. Federalism: Intergovernmental Relations
  4. Civil Rights
  5. Civil Liberties
Week 3 — The Executive & Legislative Branches

Readings:

1. Textbook, Chapters 6 – 8
2. YouTube Video: “I’m Just a Bill,” Schoolhouse Rock!

Lectures:

- Tuesday, 18 August
  1. Congress: An Overview
  2. Congress: Impediments to Representation
  3. Congress: What MCs Do
- Thursday, 20 August
  1. The Presidency: Powers
  2. The Presidency: Role in American Politics
  3. Principal–Agent Problems
  4. The Bureaucracy: An Overview

Week 4 — The Judiciary; Economic Inequality & Public Opinion

Readings:

1. Textbook, Chapters 9 – 10

Lectures:

- Tuesday, 25 August
  1. The Judiciary: An Overview
  2. The Judiciary: The Supreme Court
  3. The Judiciary: Landmark Cases
- Thursday, 27 August
  1. Economic Inequality
  2. Public Opinion
  3. Political Polarization
Week 5 — Elections & The Media

Readings:

1. Textbook, Chapters 11 – 14

Lectures:

• Tuesday, 1 September
  1. Elections
  2. The Median Voter Theorem
  3. Voting
  4. Political Parties: An Overview
  5. Political Parties: The Evolution of the Party System

• Thursday, 3 September
  1. Interest Groups
  2. The Media
  3. Course Wrap Up