



PS 40: Introduction to American Politics

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00-11:30am

Public Affairs, Room 2270

Instructor: Ajax Peris

3244 Bunche Hall (Wednesdays 9:00-10:00am)

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Purpose of the Course

This course is an introduction to American national political *institutions*, the factors that motivate political *behavior*, and the *constraints* that shape these things. The course makes use of a number of political science theories. Topics to be covered include the American Constitution, civil rights, civil liberties, the presidency, Congress, political parties, elections, public opinion, the media, advertising, and political polling.

The course is designed to make you think about the logic of the institutions of our government and the consequences – both intended and unintended – of these institutions on the political behavior of citizens, legislators, and other political leaders and activists. We will focus on how American political institutions are designed to solve coordination and collective action problems. And why this means change is ultimately slow.

It is important that you attend all lectures, as some material for exams will be discussed in lecture but not covered in the readings. You are responsible for all material in assigned readings and discussed in class. While lecture attendance is not mandatory, choosing to miss a lesson is costly in terms of your grade.

Please visit the course web page regularly for information about the course, including the syllabus, paper assignment, contact information, and links to required readings.

Surviving a Class this Large

This is a larger class than you are probably accustomed to. Big doesn't necessarily mean bad. I've found that a few things work well in a class this size:

1. Use the discussion board called "Discussion Forum" on the class web page to get answers to your questions. This is the easiest and fastest way to get answers – either from me or from another student. I know when new posts are made to the board and I monitor the discussion carefully. If someone gives out incorrect information, I will correct it. I check the board daily and will respond to your questions promptly.
2. You are always welcome to come to my office hours if you need personal advice. I welcome the chance to meet each of you, but if you have a question about the course, the answer to which could benefit others in the class, please post it to the discussion board and it will be answered quickly.
3. Arrive on time and don't leave early. For your own benefit and that of your fellow students, please plan accordingly.

Required Books (Available at the UCLA Bookstore)

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2015. *The Logic of American Politics*, 8th Edition. CQ Press.

Note: Previous editions of this book are acceptable, but they are slightly different. It is your responsibility to ensure you have read all the course material.

Additional readings will be distributed as PDF documents via the course webpage. You are responsible for having the appropriate software to view these materials.

Course Requirements

This course will have one in-class exam, a final paper, and an on-line final exam. Your grade will be determined by weighing each assignment as follows:

- Mid-term Exam 25%
- Final Exam 25%
- Final Paper 25%
- In-Class/Online Participation, Quizzes 25%

Current Events

Many of the elements of American Politics that we will discuss in this course will be playing out in real time during the term. Whether it's presidential actions, the Supreme Court, Congressional legislation, or partisan politics, you'll have an opportunity to see it in action as we learn about it. Your ability to discuss current events in American politics will greatly enhance your understanding of the course material, plus it will help you participate in class discussions. You should keep up with current events through various news sources.

The way news is consumed and produced is changing along with technologies that make data easier to collect, store, and analyze. Below are a few recommended resources to help you gather political news.

- Google News – Google aggregates news from a multitude of sources, and it even provides multiple sources for any given news story.
- Twitter – Many political reporters rely on Twitter to communicate with one another and with news consumers. You should open a Twitter account and follow a few political reporters and political scientists. Some suggestions:
 - Ezra Klein, David Leonhardt, Vox.com, The Upshot, John Dickerson, Chuck Todd, Lynn Vavreck, Michael Ross.
 - *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*

Attendance

Given the compressed nature of the summer term, you are strongly encouraged to attend every lesson. I will be awarding participation credit based on our discussion in class, and if you aren't present, you can't earn any points, so your grade may suffer. Excused absences will be granted for medically documented emergencies or illnesses (this requires a doctor's letter) or a note from a UCLA administrator explaining your extenuating circumstances.

Absences are unexcused for all other reasons. It is your responsibility to find out what you missed, whether your absence is excused or not.

Quizzes

There will be several unannounced quizzes covering assigned readings for that day. Completing the reading should prepare you sufficiently for the quiz.

On-Line Discussion Forum

There will be several assigned discussion forum items. You are expected to respond in the forum to a specific prompt(s) or question(s), then for full credit, you need to also engage another student's response in a substantive way. All forum posts are expected to be well-written, thoughtful, and include at least 100 words.

The Paper

You must submit your paper to me electronically via the assignment link on the course webpage. You should submit them as a PDF document. It is your responsibility to ensure you have the software to publish a PDF. Due dates are in the syllabus and on the assignment page. I will provide a format guide that you should follow. I expect your papers to be correctly formatted and to have correct spelling and grammar.

You must write clearly and carefully. I am asking you to make an argument, backed up by logic and facts. I encourage you to think carefully about your paper, discuss it with me, and use the university's writing support programs if needed. *The purpose of the papers is to teach you to craft an argument using data.*

Late Work

All written assignments will be submitted electronically as PDF documents to the appropriate link on the course page. Please do not email your papers. Any work submitted late receives a penalty of one letter grade for every day it is late (starting immediately after the work is due). The only acceptable excuses for late work are 1) a note from a UCLA administrator, or 2) a note from a doctor documenting an illness. Computer crashes and software problems are not excusable. You may submit your work late, but you pay a price of one letter grade per day on the assignment.

Academic Honesty

All of the written work you do in this course is expected to be your own. I encourage you to discuss matters relating to this course with other classmates, friends, family members, and students, but your papers and exam answers must be your own ideas and your own words. If you are having trouble completing a paper, contact me or the UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center for help before you resort to the use of someone else's words or ideas without proper attribution. If you are unfamiliar with the University's policy on academic dishonesty and associated penalties, see <http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu>.

Lying to a faculty member about anything relating to this course constitutes academic dishonesty and requires reporting to the Dean and can result in possible suspension or dismissal.

Learning Disabilities

Students with university-documented learning disabilities should inform me as soon as possible of their needs. This is especially important if you require more time for exams. If you suspect you have a learning disability and have not been tested for one, contact the UCLA Office for Students with Disabilities (310) 825-1501. You cannot tell us you have a learning disability on the day before the exam. We won't be able to accommodate you on such short notice.

Office Hours

You can visit me in office hours on Wednesdays between 9:00 and 10:00am. If you have a class conflict with that time, you may email me to request to meet at an alternate time. My office is in Bunche Hall, room 3244 (directly across from the elevators).

Schedule of the Course

Day	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Week 1 – Tues Aug 8	What is Politics? Prisoner’s Dilemma	Logic of American Politics – Ch 1	Forum Post (ISideWith.com)
Week 1 – Thurs Aug 10	The Constitution and Federalism	Logic of American Politics – Ch 2,3	
Week 2 – Tues Aug 15	Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	Logic of American Politics – Ch 4,5	
Week 2 – Thurs Aug 17	Public Opinion Surveys, Polls, and Policy	Logic of American Politics – Ch 10 Asher – Analyzing Polls	
Week 3 – Tues Aug 22	The Presidency	Logic of American Politics – Ch 7	Mid-Term Exam
Week 3 – Thurs Aug 24	How to Make an Argument. Congress	Logic of American Politics – Ch 6	
Week 4 – Tues Aug 29	The Bureaucracy The Judiciary	Logic of American Politics – Ch 8,9	Paper Topic
Week 4 – Thurs Aug 31	Elections and Campaigns	Logic of American Politics – Ch 11 The Gamble – Ch 1,2	Paper Outline
Week 5– Tues Sept 5	Interest Groups and Political Parties	Logic of American Politics – Ch 12,13	
Week 5 – Thurs Sept 7	Paper Peer Reviews Polarization	Fiorina – Culture War? Wilson – How Divided?	Paper Draft
Week 6 – Tues Sept 12	The Media	Logic of American Politics – Ch 14 Purcell – The Participatory News Consumer	
Week 6 – Thurs Sept 14	American Politics Today Exam Review	Current Election Media	Final Paper Exam – Online