

POLS 110: Introduction to Political Science

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Office Hours: TR 10:30-11:30 am
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TR: 12:00-1:15
Saunders 637

Important: This is a provisional syllabus designed to give you a good sense of what the actual course will look like – it is not yet the final version. It will be modified over the summer. Please do not buy the books yet – you will have plenty of time to do so once the course begins in the fall.

Course Outline: This introductory course in the discipline of Political Science seeks to get you interested in the world around us – from our immediate surroundings to the nation to the world. What is politics? How does one study it? Why should one study it? Is there unanimity or agreement on how one can understand politics? Is unanimity important?

Rather than providing singular or definitive answers to these questions, we look at how different people answer them based on different perspectives or “world-views.” Such perspectives cannot be separated from the history and economic/material interests of those who pose these questions and come up with answers. That is to say, how we see the world, what we see in it, depends on where we see it from – which is, of course, the meaning of the word “perspective.”

Given such an understanding, students should immediately realize that an introductory course on political science does not provide them with clear-cut and definitive answers to the pressing questions of our time. Rather, such a course is more likely to show how one poses questions, what one considers to be the most important questions of our time, what sorts of answers there are to such questions – all these are contestable matters with little agreement and marked by much debate and difference of opinion.

So, while an introductory course in Astronomy or Physics or Calculus may cover the “basics” of the field – that is, the widely accepted and nearly unanimous or consensual understanding of the most fundamental aspects of the domain of study- an introductory course in political science is more in the nature of a survey of the different opinions and perspectives and world-views, and an examination into the possible reasons for why people see the world so differently.

At the same time, it would be foolish to deny the fact that certain perspectives or world-views or opinions about world politics are far more influential than others. This “common sense,” which is not the same thing as “truth,” prevails across a number of domains of politics. To many of us today it would appear to be commonsensical to argue that since most countries that are rich are also marked by

capitalism and democracy, that there is a causal relationship between wealth, on the one hand, and capitalist democracy on the other.

Similarly, for all too many people, it is commonsense to think that as the alleged bulk of the world's acts of terrorism are perpetrated by individuals who are of a Muslim background, there must be something in that religion that predisposes its followers to commit acts of terror.

In this course, we regard the commonsense as a perspective that has gained a highly influential- a hegemonic- status not because its necessarily closer to the truth, but because it is underlain by the economic wealth, political interests, media predominance and cultural preponderance of the most powerful societies of the world at this point in time.

A related purpose of this course then is to complicate or deconstruct this commonsense – to highlight the perspectival rather than the truthful nature of such commonsense, and to adopt a questioning attitude towards commonsense in world politics rather than just replicate or reinforce it. Such a viewpoint, frequently described as a critical take on politics, does not itself pretend to be the truth but rather invites an attitude of skepticism and inquiry towards all matter social and political that masquerade as the commonsense.

Our course moves through three sections: local, global, and national. We begin right here at home. We will look at a few articles and book chapters that render our own neighborhoods strange or remarkable – and offer a way of politicizing our perspectives. They show us what is hidden in plain sight and sensitize us to view the world around us in a political way.

From there we move to a global scale and ask deceptively simple questions: why are some countries rich and others poor? Why are some people rich and others poor? Was it always this way? Once again, rather than offer definitive answers, we look at differing perspectives or world views that produce multiple answers to such questions.

In the third and final section of the course, we turn to the national level: we look at the way American politics has evolved in the last four decades on two central issues: (a) economic inequality, and (b) racial inequality. These readings will focus on matters of great contemporary or current relevance and will give us a glimpse into how students of politics go about their research work at this time.

Course Expectations: Given our starting premise that we have perspectives rather than consensual truths in the study of politics, it follows that I regard class participation, debate, and a healthy exchange of views as an integral component of this course. Attendance will be taken every class, and informed, engaged and respectful class participation will count for 10% of your overall course grade.

There will be three take-home examinations, together accounting for 90% of your final grade. These exams are non-cumulative in that each of them will cover only the weeks preceding the examinations. The exam will be given to you on a Wednesday and will be due the following week– in class. I will have more to say on these take-home exams as the course evolves through the weeks.

The dates for the three take-home examinations are highlighted in yellow. Please note that there will be no extensions for submitting the take-home exams except in the case of emergencies (for which adequate proof will have to be provided).

Course Readings: You will have to buy 3 books for this course (listed below). All the other readings for the course are uploaded on the Resources tab of the Laulima website for this course. Use this course syllabus to guide you to the reading for each class meeting. You need to do the readings prior to the class meetings and come to the latter prepared to discuss and debate the ideas therein rather than sit back and listen to a lecture. So, get familiar with Laulima and be prepared to use it extensively over the next few weeks.

The three books you will need to buy are:

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson: Winner-Take-All Politics: how Washington made the rich richer and turned its back on the Middle Class (Simon and Schuster, 2010).

Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness (The New Press, 2012).

Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (Text Publishing, 2015).

You can buy them in paperback at Barnes and Noble – or from amazon.com or other such e-tailers. You can also buy them as Kindle editions for your electronic device.

Course Schedule:

Aug 21 (T): Introduction to the course, readings, expectations, grading, and policies. Self-introductions by participants.

Aug 23 (R): Read: “Introduction” from David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (eds.) Theory and Method in Political Science. On Laulima: look under Marsh and Stoker.

Aug 28 (T): Read: Chapter One from Marsh and Stoker, Theory and Method in Political Science.

Aug 30 (R): continue discussion on Marsh and Stoker, from Laulima.

Sep 4 (T): For a different take on understanding politics and political science, let's look at an influential textbook. Read: "Introduction" from Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss, Global Politics. On Lulima.

Sep 6 (R): Let's begin locally. What can political science do to help us understand the world immediately around us? Neal Milner, "Home, Homelessness and Homeland in the Kalama Valley: Re-imagining a Hawaiian Nation Through a Property Dispute" Hawaiian Journal of History (Vol. 40, 2006). On Lulima (milner.pdf)

Sep 11 (T): Read: Continue the discussion on Kalama Valley and the politics of the world right around us.

Sep 13 (R): Moving out to the state: how do we learn to see what is hidden in plain sight? Read: Excerpts from Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull, Oh Say Can You See? The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai'i (Minnesota, 1998). Read the Introduction for today. On Lulima (Oh Say Can You See.pdf)

Sep 18 (T): Read: the chapter on Punchbowl National Cemetery from Ferguson and Turnbull. On Lulima.

Sep 20 (R): Read: the chapter on the Arizona Memorial from Ferguson and Turnbull. On Lulima.

Sep 25 (T): What have we learned about politics, political science, and the immediate world around us? Discussion on all readings to date. **First take-home exam assignment distributed to class.**

Sep 27 (R): First take-home assignment exam due in class today.

Moving from the local to the global. How has the world come to be so unequal? Why is there a first and a third world? Was it always this way? When did this happen? Why did this happen? Do poor people and poor countries deserve to be poor? Can they ever become rich?

Read: Paul Cammack, "Why are some people better off than others?" Chapter 19 from World Politics, pages: 405-428. On Lulima (Global Politics Edkins Zehfuss.pdf)

Oct 2 (T) and Oct 4 (R): Read: the first 3 chapters from the 1st book of Adam Smith, An Inquiry Into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 1776. On Lulima (adamsmith.pdf)

Oct 9, 11, 16, 18 (T, R, T, R): What are the two main narratives that seek to explain global wealth and poverty? How do Adam Smith and Karl Marx continue to set the paradigmatic models to explain economic success and failure? Read: Sankaran Krishna, Introduction and Chapters 1-2 from his Globalization and Postcolonialism:

hegemony and resistance in the 21st century (2009)

([globalizationandpostcolonialism Krishna.pdf](#)), and Krishna, "How does colonialism work?" from [Global Politics](#), chapter 16, pages: 338-362: both on Laulima.

Oct 23 and 25 (T, R): What is the real story behind free markets, capitalism, and economic success? Did the early developers succeed through laissez-faire? What lessons should developing societies learn from history? Read: Chang Ha-Joon, *Bad Samaritans*. Relevant chapters excerpted at Laulima at [Bad Samaritans.pdf](#)

Second Take-Home assignment distributed to class today.

Oct 30 (T): Second Take-Home exam due in class today.

Moving from the Global to the National. How is the United States doing? What have been some of the important political developments in the US in recent decades? How did the top 1% become so rich? Is it that they are much smarter than the rest of us? What explanations can we find for the rising inequality of the US?

Read: Introduction to Hacker and Pierson, [Winner Take All Politics](#).

Nov 6, 8, 12, 15 (T, R, T, R): Read: Hacker and Pierson, [Winner Take All Politics](#).

Nov 20, 27, 29 (T, T, R): Besides rising inequality, the other pressing issue in the US seems to be that of racial discord. Do Black Lives Matter or do All Lives Matter? Do blacks have a predisposition for crime? How do we go beyond easy stereotypes and understand racial difference and violence in the US in historical perspective?

Read: Michelle Alexander: [The New Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness](#).

Dec 4 and 6 (T, R): Read: Ta Nehisi Coates, [Between the World and Me](#).

Third take-home final assignment distributed in class today. Assignments are due back to me on Dec 11th (T) by 4:00 pm via email.