

POLS 110: Introduction to Political Science

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Spring 2016
MW: 1:30-2:45
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Dear student: this is a provisional syllabus for POLS 110. It is based on a previous semester and is designed to give you a fairly good idea of what the course will look like. The final version of the actual syllabus will be uploaded to Laulima in early January 2017.

Course Outline: This introductory course in the discipline of Political Science focuses on some very commonsensical and basic questions about the contemporary world: (a) why are some countries rich and others poor? (b) why are so many people risking their lives to get across from northern Africa or the middle East into Europe, or from Mexico into the United States, and why do governments put so many obstacles in their way? (c) was our world always so unequal in terms of wealth and poverty or is this a more recent phenomenon? (d) why do we think “terrorist” when we hear the words “Muslim” or “Islam” or “Middle East” (e) why do some countries or peoples think they know what is best for the rest of the world?

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.

The different segments of the course through the weeks focus on a series of such ‘basic’ or fundamental questions. We begin with some readings on one of the most important issues of our time: what is the state of our planet? Do global warming and climate change represent a dire threat to the existence of humans and the planet? We then move to a discussion about why and how nation-states and national boundaries govern our movement – and decide who amongst us can range freely over most of the planet and who must remain confined within territorial boundaries. In the next section of the course, we look at different theories that seek to explain the inequality of the world in terms of wealth. Why are some people, countries and regions so much better off than others? How did they come to be so wealthy? Is it because their people are smarter? Is it because nature provided them with greater resources to begin with? Is the climate in such countries more conducive to hard work compared to others? We look at various explanations for the unequal world we live in today. In the last section of the course, we turn to the matter of religion, religious intolerance, and the sources of contemporary terrorism. Is there something intrinsic to certain religions, certain regions, and certain peoples that make them more prone to engage in acts of terrorist violence towards others?

Course Expectations: Given our starting premise that we have perspectives rather than consensual truths in the study of world 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 20% of your overall course grade.

There will be two in-class examinations, together accounting for 60% of your final grade. These exams are non-cumulative in that each of them will cover only the weeks preceding the examinations.

30% of your overall grade will come from 3 one-page reports that you will file on any three of the following 5 topics: (a) are we in a planetary crisis and if we are, what should we do about it? (b) should national boundaries be abolished and people be allowed to move wherever they want to? (c) capitalism and free markets are the only way for countries to develop and everyone should adopt them to succeed, (d) colonialism is in the past and is not relevant today – and anyone who still obsesses about it needs to get over it and deal with the present, (e) it's pretty obvious that Muslims are behind most terrorist acts in the world and so Donald Trump is absolutely correct when he says the United States should simply not allow any Muslims to emigrate to this country.

These one-page reports will be both sent to me via email and posted on the Laulima website under the “Discussion and Messages” tab for this course. Others are encouraged to respond to these prompts and lively participation in that forum will make the course more fun and accessible to those who may be more hesitant about speaking up in class.

The dates for the two in-class examinations are highlighted in yellow. **Please note that there will be no make-up exams for anyone except in the most justifiable circumstance.**

Course Readings: All the readings for the course are uploaded on the Resources tab of the Laulima website for this course. A good chunk of the readings, especially at the beginning of this course, are from Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss (eds). Global Politics: A New Introduction (Routledge, 2014, 2nd Edition). Other readings from various authors on the different topics are sourced from a diversity of sources and they are uploaded onto Laulima as well. The main point about the readings is this: 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.

Course Schedule: This is schedule from a previous semester. It will be updated to reflect the spring 2017 semester shortly. It is used here merely to give you an idea of the way the course will unfold.

Jan 11th (M): Introduction to the course, readings, expectations, grading, and policies. Self-introductions by participants.

Jan 13th (W): Read: Chapter One: Introduction, from Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss, Global Politics (pages: 1-19) at Laulima.

Jan 18th: Holiday – Martin Luther King Jr. day.

Jan 20th (W): Read: Simon Dalby, “What happens if we don’t take nature for granted,” Chapter 3, from Global Politics, pages: 39-60.

Jan 25th (M): Read: Carl Death, “Can We Save the Planet?” Chapter 4 from Global Politics, pages: 61-84.

Jan 27th (W): Documentary on Climate Change and Global Warming: tba.

Feb 1st (M): Read: Roxanne Lynne Doty, “Why is people’s movement restricted?” Chapter 10 from Global Politics, pages: 200-219.

Feb 3rd (W): Read: Stuart Elden, “Why is the World divided territorially?” Chapter 11 from Global Politics, pages: 220-244.

Feb 8th (M): Read: Elena Barabantseva, “How do people come to identify with nations?” Chapter 12 from World Politics, pages: 245-268.

Feb 10th (W): Read: Michael J Shapiro, “Does the nation-state work?” Chapter 13 from World Politics, pages: 269-288.

Feb 15th (M): Holiday – Presidents Day.

Feb 17th (W): Video on Marx and political-economy.

Feb 22nd (M): Read: V. Spike Petersen, “How is the world organized economically?” Chapter 17 from World Politics, pages: 363-384.

Feb 24th (W): Read: Paul Cammack, “Why are some people better off than others?” Chapter 19 from World Politics, pages: 405-428.

Feb 29th (M): Read: the first 3 chapters from the 1st book of Adam Smith, An Inquiry Into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 1776. Excerpted at Laulima under Adam Smith.

Mar 2nd (W): Read: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, 1848. Excerpted at Laulima under Marx-Engels.

Mar 7th, 9th and 14th(M, W, M): 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), and Krishna, “How does colonialism work?” from Global Politics, chapter 16, pages: 338-362. Former reading excerpted at Laulima under Krishna-Globalization.

Mar 16th: Mid-Term Exam.

Mar 28th and 30th (W,M,W): 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 under [Chang- Bad Samaritans](#).

Apr 4th (M): Documentary on Globalization, Free Markets, and Financial Crisis: tba.

Apr 6th (W):

Apr 11th (M): Read: Peter Mandaville, "How do religious beliefs affect politics?" from [World Politics](#), chapter 6: pages: 108-131.

Apr 13th (W): Read: Edward Said, excerpts from his "Orientalism" – posted on Laulima under [Said-Orientalism](#).

Apr 18th and 20th (M,W): Read: Said, "Orientalism" and Krishna, "Postcolonial Encounters," chapter 5 from his *Globalization and Postcolonialism*, pages: 131-154. Latter excerpted at Laulima under [Krishna-Globalization](#).

Apr 25th and 27th (M,W): More on the issue of Orientalism, Islamic "terrorism" and the debate over religious versus secular causes of middle eastern unrest and violence. Guest lecture and Video documentary – instructor will be out of town.

May 2nd (M): Summarizing the section over religion, terrorism and violence and the course as a whole.

May 4th (W): Final Exam.