POLSC 110

American Government – A Historical Introduction

Spring 2026 – Lecture & Discussion, Monday and Wednesday, 7 – 8:15 P.M., HW 208

Professor:
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Office: 1741 West Building Office Hours: M. & W., 8:30 – 9:00 P.M., by appointment

1. Course Description:

Welcome to Polsc 110 - Introduction to American Government, which introduces students to the rules and institutions that govern political action in the United States. Together, we will examine how the historical evolution of American political institutions affects today's debates. Through the lenses of both history and social science, we will consider the actions of political actors inside and outside of our government, in a systematic and empirical manner.

2. Learning Outcomes:

We have three primary goals in this class. First, we will discuss the basic ideas and concerns that define American democracy to understand how government "works." We will learn how institutions first developed, and how they have subsequently constrained and shaped political action throughout U.S. history. We will develop a contextual knowledge of how political actors function within the governmental structure, of the role the American public plays in a representative government, and why political actors behave the way they do.

Our second goal is to place contemporary political issues within a historical framework. We'll build upon the basic understanding of American political institutions developed in Goal One, in order to learn to think critically about our ongoing societal debates. We will consider how battles over reproductive rights, minority representation, foreign affairs, financial regulation, and more, influence representation and shape public policy. We will examine recent events, ranging from the 2008 financial crisis to the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

Our third and final goal is to introduce you to the scientific study of politics. You will begin to learn how to read and digest academic work and how to identify puzzles within

American politics. You will become more proficient at public speaking through our in-class discussions and through a group presentation or mock constitutional convention. You will also put our learning outcomes into practice through three examinations.

2. Required Texts

1. Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck ("KJKV"). 2021. The Logic of American Politics, 10th ed. preferred, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
2. Supplemental Readings as assigned.
3. Recommended: I recommend reading a newspaper daily, or at least, a political blog.

3. Assignments and Grading

Item	Assignment Points	Grade Percentage
Exam No. 1	100	25%
Exam No. 2	100	25%
Exam No. 3	100	25%
Class Participation	100	25%
Total	400	100%

A. Exams – 75%

There will be three non-cumulative exams given during this course, each covering roughly a third of the material. You must be prepared to take all exams at the scheduled times. Make-up exams will be offered only in exceptional circumstances, which include but are not limited to the following: hospitalization, the death of a family member, observation of religious activities, or official university activities. If you must reschedule a test, you must speak with me before the regularly scheduled exam in order to discuss a make-up and receive permission to reschedule. Any make-up exam may, at my discretion, differ from the normal exam format.

B. Class Participation – 25%

It is my practice to initially verbally take attendance to get to know you, and I subsequently take it silently. While your attendance is not required, your participation is. I do not give extra credit to students who do not show up. If you can't attend class to participate, let me know beforehand, and it should be a compelling reason. Unless it's an emergency, I generally won't

excuse you after the fact. ***__If any student is experiencing COVID-like, flu-like, MPOX, or other disease symptoms, do not come to class__ – get tested, go home, and rest.*** We will often be discussing the readings in break-out groups. My usual practice is to give everyone full credit for participation for the first few weeks and, thereafter, give no credit if someone doesn't participate, whether by remaining silent or by not showing up. I also reserve the right to give no participation credit for being disruptive, being on your phone, or other reasons, including being late. Roughly 4 weeks into the semester, I pause the class and ask for feedback on how the class is progressing to date. Your participation is essential so I can calibrate appropriately for you. Finally, if I ever have to move class virtually or cancel a class, I will give you all participation marks for that class.

Course Schedule[1]

Date	**Unit**	**In Class Goings On**	**Readings**
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1/26/2026	Course Introduction	- Discussion.	
1/28/2026	Unit 1 – Major Definitions and Concepts	- Discussion.	
2/4/2026, 2/6/2026	Unit 2 – Political Foundations & Crafting the Constitution	- Lecture on 2/4. - Lecture & breakout groups on 2/6.	KJKV ch. 1-2 (SR 1) Declaration of Independence (SR 2) The Constitution
2/9/2026, 2/11/2026	Unit 3 – Our Federalist System	- Lecture on 2/9. - Lecture on 2/11.	KJKV ch. 3 (SR 3) NYTimes Magazine – Article on Norms
2/17/2026, 2/23/2026	Unit 4 – Congress	- Lecture on 2/17. - Lecture on 2/23.	KJKV ch. 6 (SR 4) Testing Theories
2/25/2026, 3/2/2026	Unit 5 - The Presidency	- Lecture on 2/25. - Lecture on 3/2.	KJKV ch. 7 (SR 5) Washington's Farewell Address (SR 6) It's Time to Abolish the Electoral College
3/4/2026	Exam 1 Review	Covers units 1 – 5	
3/9/2026	Exam 1	Covers units 1 – 5	

[1] This schedule is subject to change as needed. I will inform you of any changes by Blackboard or e-mail ASAP.

3/11/2026, 3/16/2026	Unit 6 - The Judiciary	- Lecture on 3/11. - Lecture on 3/16.	KJKV ch. 9 (SR 7) Excerpts from *Marbury v. Madison* (SR 8) Politico – Progressives and Local Judges
3/18/2026, 3/23/2026	Unit 7 - Civil Liberties	- Lecture both classes.	KJKV 5
3/25/2026	Unit 8 – The Administrative State	- Lecture.	KJKV ch. 8
3/30/2026, 4/13/2026	Unit 9 - Civil Rights	- Lecture both classes.	KJKV 4 (SR 9) *The Other America*
4/15/2026, 4/20/2026	Unit 10 – Public Opinion	- Lecture.	KJKV ch. 10 (SR 13) Politico – "Pollsters: Impossible to Say why 2020 Polls were Wrong"
4/22/2026	Exam 2	- Covers Units 6 - 9	
4/27/2026, 4/29/2026	Unit 11 - Political Parties, Voting, and Elections	- Lecture both classes	KJKV ch. 11-12 (SR 10) Political Polarization in the American Public (SR 11) Vox.com – Trump v. Amash (SR 12) – Vox.com – Anti-Democracy
5/4/2026, 5/6/2026	Unit 12 – Media, Old and New & Interest Groups	- Lecture.	KJKV ch. 13-14 (SR 14) Vox.com – "Flood the Zone" (SR 15) Vox.com – "How Trump Should Change the Way Journalists Understand Objectivity"
5/11/2026, 5/13/2026	Unit 13 – Imagining the Future	- Breakout groups with readings.	(SR 16) Utopia for Realists, Chapters 2 – 3 (SR 17) Pro-Publica – Climate Refugees (SR 18) IPCC – Policymakers' Summary
TBD	Exam 3, Time TBD	Covers Units 10 - 13	

4. Academic Honesty

This course adheres to the official statement of academic integrity adopted by the College: “Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures."

In short, dishonesty will not be tolerated. Dishonesty includes all forms of plagiarism and cheating. The work you submit must be your own, and work from other classes does not count as original work, unless both instructors have signed off before your submission. You should familiarize yourself with and understand CUNY policies on academic integrity, available here. If I believe a student has violated these rules, I must follow the procedures outlined here.

5. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY, located in Room E1214B, to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call: (212) 772- 4857 or (212) 650-3230. If you have any other needs (e.g., religious observances), not covered by the Office of AccessABILITY, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements before conflict arises.

6. Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct

Hunter Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:
https://hunter.cuny.edu/public-safety/policies/sexual-assault-and-misconduct/#:~:text=The%20Title%20IX%20team%20are,%40hunter.cuny.edu%20.

CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:

http://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/Sexual-Misconduct.pdf

7. Use of Electronics in Class and Unauthorized Recording of Lectures

Laptops and tablets are permitted during class; phone use is not. If you must make a phone call, or receive one (we all have emergencies), please step outside class/mute yourself. If you are texting in class, I will ask you to put away the phone, and if necessary, dock participation points. I do not permit the audio or video recording of lectures by students unless the Office of AccessABILITY requests it or I grant permission to do so.

8. Other Course Policies

Assigned Readings, BlackBoard, and Email

Readings are typically assigned on a weekly basis and should ideally be completed before the start of the first class for each topic. This ensures that you will more fully understand the topics that we discuss. The course's BlackBoard site will contain vital information for the semester: details on assignments, supplemental assigned readings, and updates to material (e.g., the syllabus) if there are any changes to the schedule. **Powerpoints are posted, when used, after each unit is completed, and not before.** I will occasionally send announcements to the class via email. You are automatically subscribed to the class list, but it is your responsibility to check your Hunter College account daily.

I only read student e-mails sent to my Hunter e-mail address listed on this syllabus. You should include the course code (Polsc 110) in your e-mail's subject line to me, as I may not otherwise respond. I usually respond within the week, and typically after class hours – you don't need to follow up every hour, on the hour.

Grading & Exam Procedures

Except in unusual circumstances, I generally return work within two weeks of submission. I am committed to grading work objectively and fairly. If you have questions or concerns about your exam scores and assignment grades, come speak to me. **All requests for a**

re-grade must be made with a detailed written justification illustrating what you think I missed within one week that the assignment was returned to the class. Requests to re-grade an exam or assignment may result in a lower score than originally awarded. I may, from time to time, provide extra credit. That is awarded at my discretion and may not be honored or awarded if you are not otherwise in compliance with exam procedures or course policies, i.e., you turn something in late, or do not participate in class discussions.

Recommendations

As you start your college years, please understand that professors are not obligated to write references for any student who asks us to do. I won't be a reference or write a recommendation letter for a student unless I can say or write very positive things about you and mention specific details. I recommend that you develop relationships with professors in the classes you like and are interested in, so that they will write glowing letters for you.

So - provided that you do sufficiently well in the class, I'm happy to write a letter of recommendation or serve as a reference for you. This is subject to one caveat – I am an adjunct, and so for certain purposes my word will carry less weight than tenured faculty. Conversely, given that I am a lawyer, law schools may look favorably upon my recommendation, since I have gone through the whole process and, at least in theory, can speak to a student's ability to perform well in law school and their fitness as a lawyer. Tl:dr caveat emptor.