

Poli 10: Introduction to American Politics

Summer Session II 2017

Instructor: Brandon Merrell, bmerrell@ucsd.edu
Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00pm–7:50pm in CSB 004
Office Hours: Mondays 3:00–4:50pm (and by appointment) in SSB 341
Online Content: <http://TritonEd.ucsd.edu>
TA: Skyler Roth, seroth@ucsd.edu (TA office hours by appointment only)

Description: This course provides an overview of the political system in the United States, an introduction to the institutions and behaviors studied by political scientists, and examples of modern social science approaches to inquiry. Your objective is to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and analyze political interactions. By the end of the term, you will be expected to:

- understand the origins and functions of American political institutions;
- make sense of the behaviors of voters, interest groups, and elected officials; and
- interpret and assess many of the theories and empirical contributions of political science.

Prerequisites: This is an introductory undergraduate course. No previous work in the subject is necessary. However, students can prepare for the class by developing a working knowledge of current political events and by reading major news stories on a daily basis. I expect students to participate in discussions as we move between analytic stylization and accounts of contemporary and historic political events. Be prepared to ask and answer questions!

Textbook: The following textbook is available through the campus bookstore, is accessible for either purchase or rental online, and is also on reserve at the library. The sixth and seventh editions are acceptable, but take note that specific details and pagination will differ.

- *The Logic of American Politics* (LAP). Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck [8th Edition].

Rules and Requirements: The course requirements consist of participation (10%), quizzes (20%), a midterm exam (35%, August 21st), and a final exam (35%, September 8th). Tests may include identification, short-answer, and essay questions. You must earn a passing grade on both exams to pass the overall course. I use the following grading scale: “A-” = [90-93.3], “A” = [93.3-96.6], “A+” = [96.6-100], with other letter grades following analogous intervals.

Quizzes: At the beginning of each class, students will answer a series of short questions on material from the assigned readings and/or the previous lecture. I will drop your lowest quiz score when calculating your overall grade.

Academic Dishonesty: All work must be completed by the individual to whom it is assigned. Students are not permitted to use unauthorized assistance of any kind. Any student who is caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office for administrative sanction.

Late Assignments and Missed Exams: Make-up assignments are only offered under valid and documented circumstances. If you know you will miss an exam for a legitimate reason, notify me at least a week in advance. Email is perfectly acceptable. If you cannot contact me in advance, you must do so as soon as possible. I will work with you to resolve reasonable problems, but it is your responsibility to arrange with me to take a makeup exam. All make-up work must be submitted at least 48 hours prior to the grade submission deadline.

Attendance: Class attendance is not mandatory but will probably improve your performance on assignments. Information we cover in class either may not be in the readings or may not be in easily interpretable form. Some material is also easier to learn when you hear someone explain it and/or when you have an opportunity to discuss it with others. Come prepared to discuss and comment on assigned material. Remember that disagreement and discussion are strongly encouraged, but disrespect of other participants is not.

Grades and Appeals: You will be graded solely on your academic performance. This includes clarity of thought, knowledge of the material, composition, spelling, and grammar. Students can appeal grades that they believe are incorrect. Appeals will consist of one typed page that identifies the problem and presents a reasoned argument that revision is appropriate. Appeals must be submitted within one week of the return of an assignment.

Disability: Students who will request accommodations should register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (University Center 202; 858.534.4382) and provide me with documentation outlining appropriate accommodations. I am happy to meet with you during my office hours to discuss your needs.

Readings and Course Schedule:

Part I: Theories of Political Interaction and Political Behavior

Meeting #1: Introduction and Overview (Monday, August 7th)

Topics:

- Logistics and overview for the course
- What are theories and why do we need them?
- Why should you care about government? What does it *do*?
- Overview of the American colonies through independence

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 1: "The Logic of American Politics"

Meeting #2: Strategic Behavior and Institutional Design (Wednesday, August 9th)

Topics:

- Introduction to strategic behavior and strategic analysis
- The Articles of Confederation, collective action, and the U.S. Constitution
- Federalism, home rule, and state and local politics

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 2 ("The Constitution") & Chapter 3 ("Federalism")
- Federalist 51 & Federalist 10

Meeting #3: Public Opinion (Monday, August 14th)

Topics:

- Coercion, power, principals, and agents
- What do Americans think about politics?
- Measuring public opinion and the science of surveys
- Party ID, partisanship, and ideology.
- Voting, elections, and spatial models.

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 10: "Public Opinion"
- LAP Chapter 11: "Voting, Campaigns, and Elections"

Meeting #4: Organized Interests (Wednesday, August 16th)

Topics:

- Encouraging turnout
- Political parties and party systems: history and influence
- Lobbying and campaign finance
- Political polarization
- Pre-midterm recap

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 12: "Political Parties"
- LAP Chapter 13: "Interest Groups"

Meeting #5: Midterm Exam (Monday, August 21st)

Part II: American Institutions

Meeting #6: The Judiciary, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties (Wednesday, August 23rd)

Topics:

- Court systems in the U.S.
- Judicial review and constitutional interpretation
- The Supreme Court
- Landmark cases
- Civil rights: major events, essential lessons

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 4: "Civil Rights"
- LAP Chapter 5: "Civil Liberties"
- LAP Chapter 9: "The Federal Judiciary"

Meeting #7: Congress (Monday, August 28th)

Topics:

- Congress and representation
- Gerrymandering
- Pork Barrel politics and incumbency advantages
- What legislators actually do
- Congressional organization: committees, rules, gatekeepers, and procedures
- Party polarization

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 6: "Congress"

Meeting #8: The Executive and the Bureaucracy (Wednesday, August 30th)

Topics:

- Modern presidential powers
- The historical presidency
- Commander in chief, head of state, leader of the party
- White House staff
- Vetos, signing statements, executive orders, and executive privilege
- The bully pulpit

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 7: "The Presidency"
- Guest Lecture by Skyler Roth

Meeting #9: The Bureaucracy (Monday, September 4th)

Topics:

- Changes in the bureaucracy and bureaucratic employment
- Executive departments
- Independent agencies and government corporations
- Principal-agent problems, fire alarms, and police patrols

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 8: "The Bureaucracy"

Meeting #10: The News Media (Wednesday, September 6th)

Topics:

- The media, its interests, and its consumption
- How does the media affect opinion?
- How do political actors use the media?
- Current research on the role of the media
- American politics: the good, the bad, and the ugly
- Final exam review

Readings:

- LAP Chapter 14: "The News Media"

Meeting #11: Final Exam (Friday, September 8th, 7:00-10:00pm)