**Teaching American Politics**

POLSC 591

Spring 2020

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**Course Description**

Today more than ever, courses in American politics are vitally important to young adults’ education. The social problems our high school and college students will face are quite complex, requiring sophisticated, evidence-based policy solutions. At the same time, forces such as gridlock, polarization, apathy, and distrust of our governing institutions are eroding our collective capacity to offer *any* solutions, much less sophisticated ones. Done well, though, an introduction to concepts, theories, and patterns undergirding American politics can help students understand and constructively critique what is working, what is not, and what is required for positive change. It can also inspire them to work toward making these changes. In sum, an introductory American politics course can prepare students to be *citizens* in the fullest sense of the word.

“Teaching American Politics” is designed to help instructors effectively enhance the civic capacity of their students through an introductory college-level course. While we will cover some substantive political science content, the primary focus will be pedagogical. Within the context of American politics, the course will consider topics such as how to:

* Develop appropriate learning goals for the course
* Utilize different disciplinary approaches in developing lessons
* Create interactive, engaging learning with the concepts the course must cover
* Foster productive discussion across political difference, and
* Develop assessments and writing assignments that encourage critical thinking and attention to evidentiary standards.

The course is designed to be collaborative. Through the online discussion board, students and the instructor will share and critique ideas concerning how best to prepare, teach, and assess for an American politics course. It also does not take a dogmatic approach; there are many different ways to teach such a course well. The goal, instead, is for each student to be prepared to effectively teach with the learning goals she feels are important and the teaching style with which she feels confident.

**Prerequisites**

A bachelor’s degree, including having taken an introductory American politics course, is required. The course is geared toward educators with at least some high school or post-secondary teaching experience; no experience teaching politics or the social sciences, though, is required.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to:

* Understand the key concepts, theories, and debates that compromise the core of any American politics course
* Understand how their teaching style translates to this course, and develop learning goals, reading lists, assessments, and lesson plans that effectively apply their teaching style to the material
* Apply strategies for fostering productive discussion and classroom engagement to specific course concepts and lessons
* Reflect on how to address key pedagogical challenges unique to teaching politics, such as fostering respectful dialogue in the era of polarization, or teaching evidence-based argumentative writing in the era of ‘fake news’
* Prepare to teach introduction to American politics through developing a course syllabus, a series of lesson plans, and other materials

**Required Texts and Other Materials**

Through the course, we will primarily focus on texts that either a) directly discuss pedagogy, or b) are primary sources for politics and political science. We will use these sources as fodder to discuss potential issues in the classroom or as tools in developing lesson plans and syllabi. All of these resources will be posted on Blackboard.

The only required text for purchase is the following American Government textbook:

Ansolabehere et al. 2017. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. Full 14th ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

While we may draw directly on this text from time to time with our lesson, this will primarily be used as a source of reference as you complete your assignments. Note that you should get the “full” edition. Also note that this is *not* the most up to date version of the text. It is thus cheaper; there are used copies available on Amazon for $20-30. And, for our purposes, a 2017 text is fine.

In addition to this, on Blackboard there will be a “Resources” section that will include an array of materials and online resources that could be useful, both for this class as well as when you prepare to teach American politics.

**Course Requirements**

Assignment Board (45% of final grade): Each week, students will be asked to go through a module online. The module will consist of an introductory video discussion from the instructor[[1]](#footnote-1) and then a set of readings and/or multimedia. After going through the module, students will receive one or more detailed assignment prompts to complete. The prompts may ask students to simply reflect on the material in essay form. They also may ask students to apply the material in the module to do things such as prepare lesson plans, find appropriate primary source readings for a given class concept, develop essay prompts or assessments, or critique and grade sample student work. This work will be graded based on a) demonstrated understanding of, and critical reflection on, the material in the module, and b) the depth and detail provided in the assignment. Each of these assignments will also be posted for other students to see (see below).

Peer Critique (15% of final grade): For each assignment a student posts, the instructor will assign another student to critique it. These critiques should be roughly one paragraph long (6-8 sentences), and they should focus on providing *constructive* feedback that the student can use as she teaches American politics. The critiques can answer questions such as:

* What did you think was particularly effective or persuasive about what the student posted?
* What did you think was unpersuasive or less effective? What may have some trouble working in a classroom? Why?
* What would you change about the student’s argument or approach to make it more effective?

These critiques will be due one week after the original assignment board post is due, and they will be graded based on their depth, detail, and how constructive their critique is. They will be posted publicly. I encourage students to read through the assignment board posts and critiques other students have written. Even after the course is completed, they can be a resource as one prepares to teach introductory American politics.

Syllabus (20% of final grade): The course will close with two final assignments. The first will be to develop, in full, a syllabus for an introductory American politics course. The syllabus should detail learning objectives, requirements and assessments, a schedule of readings and class activities, and other information that would be useful to give to students as they start class. The syllabus should draw on what we have learned in our class, and the grade will partly be based on how well students have done so. The grading will also be based on the thoroughness of the syllabus as well as its originality (i.e. – the extent the syllabus does not just go off a template but is ‘one’s own’)

Content Exam (20% of final grade): The second final assignment will be a multiple choice exam based on the content covered in an introductory American politics course. While the focus of our course is pedagogy, good teaching nonetheless requires a basic understanding of the material. This exam will not be any trickier or harder than what an undergraduate could expect taking an introductory American politics course. But if it has been a while since you have taken such a course, it may behoove you to go through the textbook to prepare for this test.

**Grading Scale**

A: 100%-92% C: 77-72%

A-: 91%-90% C-: 71%-70%

B+: 89%-88% D+: 69%-68%

B: 87%-82% D: 68%-62%

B-: 81%-80% D-: 61%-60%

C+: 79-78% F: >60%

**Grades**

All grades will be posted on Blackboard shortly after the assignment is due (click the “My Grades” link). If you have a question or concern on any grade, or want deeper feedback, contact me and we can discuss.

**Make-Up Assignments and Tests**

All assignments listed above are to be completed by their indicated due date. For every day the assignment is late, I will deduct one half of a letter grade from the overall grade for the assignment. Often, however, I can waive this penalty if you have extenuating circumstances or need extra time. *Please contact me well before the assignment/test is due if you think you may not make the due date, and see if we can work something out*.

**Office Hours**

Office hours are listed at the beginning of this syllabus. I am happy to meet, talk, or email about the course or assignments outside of class and outside my office hours. Please schedule such appointments with me via email.

**Course Schedule**

Below are the eight weekly modules that must be completed for the course. Each module lists the date that it is due, and it lists the date when peer critique is due (which student you critique on which week will be assigned by the instructor). For each module, start by watching the introductory lecture from the instructor. Then, complete the reading and then the assignment. Feel free to email if you have any questions about the material or assignments.

For many of the weeks, chapters of the Lowi et al. textbook are listed in the required reading. These chapters will provide the content basis for some of the assignments, and reading them may help with the Content Exam at the end of the course. However, if you have taken an American Politics course recently, you may only need to skim them or consult the textbook as needed. If not, I encourage you to study the textbook more thoroughly.

Outside of the textbook, all other reading will be posted on Blackboard in a section marked “Readings.” The lectures for each week will also periodically point to items in the “Resources” section of Blackboard that may be helpful—a collection of syllabi, assignment prompts, lecture and test resources, etc.

**Week One: Introductions, Goals, and Approaches (Due Date: x. Peer Critique Due: y)**

Reading: Brennan, selection from *Against Democracy*

Pew Center Reports on Polarization and Information Literacy

Lindsay, *The Craft of University Teaching*, Chapter Two

Lowi et al. Chapters 1-3

**Week Two: Readings, Inside and Outside of the Textbook**

Reading: Baranowski. 2019. “The Daily Show vs. the New York Times: Comparing

Their Effects on Student Political Knowledge and Engagement.” *Journal*

*of Political Science Education (JPSE)*

Selections from *The Federalist Papers* and *Anti-Federalist Papers*

Gladwell, “Is Marijuana as Safe as We Think?”, *The New Yorker*

Lowi et al. Chapters 4-5

**Week Three: Engaged Learning**

Reading: Cavanagh, “How to Make Your Teaching More Engaging,” *Chronicle of*

*Higher Education*

Cobb. 2015. “Turning the Classroom Upside Down: Experimenting with the

Flipped Classroom in American Government.” *JPSE*

Lowi et al. Chapter 6

**Week Four: Lecturing and Technology**

Reading: Lindsay, *The Craft of University Teaching*, Chapter 5

Miller, Selection from *Minds Online*

Lupia, Selection from *Uninformed*

Lowi et al. Chapter 7

**Week Five: Simulations**

Reading: Williams and Chergosky. 2019. “Teaching Judicial Politics Through a Supreme

Court Simulation.” *JPSE*.

Baranowski. 2006. “Single Session Simulations: The Effectiveness of Short

Congressional Simulations in Introductory American Government

Classes.” *JPSE*.

Lowi et al. Chapters 8-9

**Week Six: Discussion, Diversity, and Political Difference**

Reading: Deardorff. 2013. “The Professor, Pluralism, and Pedagogy: A Reflection”

*JPSE*.

Lukiaoff and Haidt, selection from *The Coddling of the American Mind.*

Gutmann and Thompson, selection from *Why Deliberative Democracy?*

Fragment from J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty*

Lowi et al. Chapters 10-12

**Week Seven: Encouraging Good Sourcing and Writing, in the Era of “Fake News”**

Reading: Delli Carpini, selection from *After Broadcast News*

Guess et al., “Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the

consumption of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign”

“The Toulmin Model,” CSU Writing Guide

King, fragment from *On Writing*

Lowi et al. Chapters 13-14

**Week Eight: Assessing What Was Learned**

Reading: Leithner. 2011. “Do Student Learning Styles Translate to Different ‘Testing’

Styles?” *JPSE*.

Fitzgerald and Baird. 2011. “Taking a Step Back: Teaching Critical Thinking by

Distingushing Appropriate Types of Evidence.” *Political Science and*

*Politics*.

Lowi et al. Chapter 15-17

**Additional Policies and Information**

**Academic Responsibility, Integrity and Ethics**

As described in the CSU-Pueblo Academic Catalog, it is a student’s responsibility to produce original academic work in an honest and ethical manner. Academic dishonestly constitutes grounds for severe punishment, up to and including failure of the course. The catalog describes academic dishonesty as including the following activities (not an exhaustive list):

* Cheating—intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours.
* Fabrication—intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise; or of documentation meant to excuse or justify adjustments related to attendance or completion of work (exams, exercises, etc.)
* Facilitating Academic Dishonesty—intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit academic dishonesty.
* Plagiarism—the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, or statements of another person as one’s own without acknowledgment.
* Unauthorized Collaboration—-intentionally sharing information or working together in an academic exercise when such actions are not approved by the course instructor

**Accommodations**

Colorado State University-Pueblo abides by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which stipulates that no student shall be denied the benefits of an education "solely by reason of a handicap." If you have a documented disability that may impact your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see the Disability Resource & Support Center as soon as possible to arrange accommodations. In order to receive accommodations, you must be registered with and provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Resource & Support Center, which is located in the Library and Academic Resources Center, Suite 169.

**Mandatory Reporting**

Colorado State University-Pueblo is committed to maintaining respectful, safe, and nonthreatening educational, working, and living environments. As part of this commitment, and in order to comply with federal law, the University has adopted a Policy on Discrimination, Protected Class Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking, & Retaliation. You can find information regarding this policy, how to report violations of this policy, and resources available to you, on the Office of Institutional Equity’s website ([www.csupueblo.edu/institutional-equity](http://www.csupueblo.edu/institutional-equity)).

Please familiarize yourself with the reporting requirements of this policy. Because I am a faculty member, I am a "Responsible Employee." That means I have to report to the Director of the Office of Institutional Equity if you tell me that you were subjected to, or engaged in, of any of the following acts: discrimination, protected class harassment, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, and retaliation.

**Political Science Student Learning Outcomes**

Students in this course will demonstrate the following Political Science Student Learning Outcomes:

* To communicate effectively in class and in class presentations
* To write concise, clear, and knowledgeable papers
* To critically analyze readings and core class concepts, and
* To express their knowledge of course material in tests, papers, and class discussion

1. These are not designed to complete cover all the material, but to introduce the main ideas and key questions students should be thinking about as they go through the module and assignments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)