

PSC 101-001:

Introduction to Political Science

Fall 2023 | Online
Classroom: Canvas

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 205D

Office Hours:

Physical – M/W: 1:00 – 2:45 pm

T/R: 2:15 – 3:00 pm

Virtual – M/W: 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Appointment – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time

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“Politics is who gets what, when, how.”

- Harold Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935)

“Uh, Lisa, the whole reason we have elected officials is so we don’t have to think all the time. Just like that rainforest scare a few years back: our officials saw there was a problem and they fixed it, didn’t they?”

- Homer Simpson, [Bart’s Comet](#) (1995)

“A review of history’s ambitious projects...demonstrates that only three drivers have been sufficient to create them; *defense...the promise of economic return...and the praise of power*”

- Neil deGrasse Tyson, *The Sky is Not the Limit: Adventures of an Urban Astrophysicist* (2004)

Course Description & Rationale:

What is politics? This seems to be a simple question. It, however, has numerous and contested answers. The three quotes above show how varied responses are.

Some, like [Lasswell](#), understand politics as the relationship between humans and things. America’s favorite dad, Homer Simpson, suggests it includes something about representation and resolving problems. Finally, [Neil deGrasse Tyson](#) proposes politics – through the motives of defense, economics, and/or power – allows humans to collectively work together to achieve ambitious projects.

But what about schools and education; are these parts of politics? Are subjects like the economy, [environment](#), and health care political? To what level are conflicts an element of politics? If law is part of politics, is justice also a political question and, if so, does this make ethics and religion components of politics? If [art](#), music, and film express ideas concerning these topics, are even these parts of our political lives?

As the previous paragraph suggests, we need to examine numerous topics to know what politics are. In this course, we will begin to answer this question by exploring subjects both near and far from our daily lives. We will examine topics that you might have experience with, such as [elections](#) or political ideology, and ones that may be more remote to your personal experiences, such as [civil war](#) and genocide.

To help us understand politics, we will engage in numerous active learning activities. Through online simulations, discussion boards, interpreting music, and reflecting on documentaries, cartoons, and movies, we will investigate the breadth of politics through a set of diverse lenses.

We also need to ask what is [political science](#)? Are politics and political science the same, overlapping, or different things? Through our class, we will come to see that political science is a systematic and comprehensive study of politics. While the study, as a whole, examines politics, we introduce ourselves to various [topics](#) and approaches used by those within political science to study the subject. This introduction will help us not only to be successful in future courses, but in understanding the place political science has within our daily lives.

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- ...describe what is politics and what the study of politics includes.
- ...clarify the difference between politics and political science.
- ...understand what the main sub-fields and topics political scientists are study.
- ...comprehend how politics extends into multiple aspects of our daily lives.
- ...recognize how ideological preferences and opinions influence our understanding of politics.
- ...improve your reading and communication skills.
- ...explain what actions you take are political.

Required Texts:

* Riemer, Neal, Douglas W. Simon, and Joseph Romance. 2015. *The Challenge of Politics: An Introduction to Political Science*. 5th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. ISBN: [978-1506323473](https://www.amazon.com/978-1506323473)

Assessments & Grading:

Active Learning Activity 5% per activity
Short Paper 10%
Three Exams 15% per exam

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = <60%

Assessment Details:¹

Readings:

While not graded, reading your textbooks is important. It is impossible to cover all the fine points of an introduction to political science through virtual presentations.

Rationale for this assessment: By reading your textbook, you come to our virtual presentations prepared to engage with the materials. Furthermore, you can have meaningful engagement with the professor when you reach out with questions. Reading will also assist you to be successful in your graded assessments.

Engaged Learning Activities:

Each Friday an engaged learning activity is released. This activity brings to life a concept or topic from that week's reading and virtual presentations. There are 13 activities during the semester. Each activity is worth 5% of a student's course grade. Each student drops the four lowest grades from these activities. Thus, nine engaged learning activities are part of a student's course grade, which composes 45% of the course grade. There are no make-up options for this area of assessment.

There are only **two exceptions** to the paragraph above. First, three engaged learning activities are required (i.e., these are not dropped from a student's course grade). These three required activities are noted on Canvas. Thus, there are ten optional activities, which students must complete at least six of these to achieve the minimum of nine engaged learning activities.

Second, the case study activity opens on Friday, September 8 and is due on Sunday, September 17. Students work in small groups to complete this activity. To facilitate this

¹ All dates and times in the syllabus are for the central time zone (CDT prior to Sunday, November 5 and CST after Sunday, November 5). If you are in a different time zone, please be aware of the time zone utilized in this course.

work, students have two weekends to complete the activity. The professor will share more details during the semester.

Rationale for this assessment: The professor uses these activities as a form of assessment because they demonstrate a student's ability to meaningfully engage with the course. Furthermore, these activities allow students to connect with the discipline in a manner that makes concepts relatable and, therefore, increases learning.

Short Paper:

Students will compose a 500- to 750-word paper answering the question: "What do *you* think is the most important question that political science should study?" I will provide more details about this assessment on Monday, September 25. The paper is due on Monday, October 30.

Rationale for this assessment: I am evaluating you in this area, as writing is a key component of any liberal education. The ability to express your thoughts clearly, concisely, and coherently is a vital skill that will serve you in your future employment and your other life endeavors. I have heard this feedback from those aiding members of Congress, working within bureaucratic agencies, serving in the military, operating as a partner in a major accounting firm, managing international logistics, writing mortgages, composing journalism, and more. Those in these and other positions share disappointments concerning the poor writing ability of recent college graduates.

Exams:

There are three section exams during the semester. Each section exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions covering material from class work and the textbook.

Students will take their exams via Canvas during a 48-hour window. These windows start on Wednesday, September 20, Wednesday, October 25, and Friday, December 1, respectively for each section exam. The one exception is I provide a 72-hour window for the last section exam, since it starts on a Friday instead of a Wednesday.

A student has a one-hour window to complete the exam once she/he opens it. Students can use their textbooks, notes, and the internet during the exam. With only 60 minutes to complete 50 questions, however, students need to prepare as if it this was a closed book, no notes, and technology free exam to be successful. The exams show one question at a time and do not allow backtracking. The questions str in a random order. **YOU SHOULD PREPARE AS IF THIS IS AN IN-CLASS, CLOSED NOTE, AND TECHNOLOGY FREE EXAM.**

I will offer a final exam during a 72-hour window that starts on Monday, December 4. This exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. This exam differs from section exams only in that the 50 questions cover material from the entire semester.

I know test taking is not the forte of all. Furthermore, it is possible that we have a bad day, get sick, or have something that prevents us from fully preparing for an exam. Thus, of these four exams, only three apply to a student's course grade. Students automatically drop their lowest exam score from their course grade. If a student is satisfied with their grades from their three section exams, they do not have to take the final exam. **Since students automatically drop their lowest exam score, there are no make-up exams.**

Rationale for this assessment: I am using this assessment to determine your level of command over the information within the course. Performance on this assessment demonstrates your ability to retain, recall, and release important information. In addition, since you can use resources on these exams, this assessment also is an indication of your ability to be organized and prepare materials.

Classroom Behavior:

I expect all students to act with courtesy for one another. Since our course investigates politics, online discussions can get passionate. During these discussions, we will treat everyone with respect. This means reading and reflecting on a classmate's thought before responding. In our responses, we debate ideas (not people), use a civil tone, and refuse to engage in personal attacks. During our dialogues, we must respect the ideas of our fellows. Ideas, however, are fair to investigate and challenge.

Multiple [studies](#) suggest the key to success in an online environment is treating it like a physical course. I have designed the pace and assessment schedule as if we were in a face-to-face traditional course. Please treat this course as if we meeting in-person on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for one-hour per day. I have done my best to break up the activities for each day into segments, however, to provide flexibility.

In addition, time management is a critical part of success (especially within an online environment). Other common [findings](#) for success in online environments includes establishing a good workspace, seeking help when needed, and eliminating distractions. Please, the moment you are feeling lost, reach out to me. I am happy to help those that communicate.

Finally, I suggest all students take physical notes as they read and engage with virtual presentations. Research [shows](#) that taking physical notes helps us to learn.

Other Policies:

Questions About Your Grades:

I cannot discuss grades over [e-mail or phone](#) due to FERPA regulations. These protect your privacy; see [here](#) for more information.

I post individual assessments grades on Canvas. I do not, however, display the grade summary (i.e., percentage in the course). This is because this "grade" is misleading. The reported percentage includes dropped assessments and considers performance on submitted work without reference to the weight of those assessments to your course grade. Multiple times, students have thought they had a grade due to this "tool" only to discover their grade was different by a full letter grade.

To ensure students fully understand their course grades, I have created a grade calculator tool that can be downloaded from our Canvas page. **Please use this tool to understand your grade.** If you need to discuss your grade, we can arrange a meeting during office hours. At the end of the semester, your course grade will only change if it can be demonstrated that there is a mathematical error in the calculation of your grade.

Late Work:

I only accept the Short Paper assessment after its due date. Every business day the assessment is late, it loses three points (e.g., 89 to 86). One week after its due date, I will no longer accept it. Any student, who does not submit this assessment on-time, or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero.

Make-up Engaged Learning Activities & Exams:

As explained in the Assessment Details section of this syllabus, there are no make-up engaged learning activities or exams. Since students can drop four engaged learning activities without penalty and can drop their lowest exam score, make-up engaged learning activities and exams are not available.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

Counseling Resources:

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with academic performance and/or negatively impact daily life. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, please contact Counseling Services at 256.782.5475 or visit <https://www.jsu.edu/ccservices/index.html> for more information or to request an appointment. Students may also stop by the Counseling Center at 147 Trustee Circle (located between Sparkman and Mason Halls) to request services. Additionally, the office offers self-help resources to explore ways students can independently support their mental health.

In the event of a crisis after hours, please contact the University Police Department at 256.782.5050 to be connected with the on-call counselor. The National Suicide Prevention hotline (988) is another resource and is available 24 hours a day. You may also reach out to Crisis Text by texting 741 741 where you will be connected to a trained responder.

Academic Integrity:

In a university community, true knowledge can be gained only through honest means. A Scholar's Code can be found in both the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs and the Student Handbook. Students who violate the Scholar's Code will be subject to disciplinary actions which could range from a zero on an assignment to failure of the course; repeated offenses can result in dismissal from the university. Records of academic dishonesty are kept in the Office of Community Standards and Student Ethics.

Student Success Center:

The Student Success Center provides an integrated network of support and meets students where they are while empowering and supporting lifelong learning. The Student Success Center is located on the Ground (Basement) Floor, 1st Floor, and 2nd floor of the Houston Cole Library and serves as your one-stop shop for student supports and services. Services include tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic and career support, success coaching, reasonable accommodations, leadership development, and peer mentoring through our Academic Support and Success, Academic and Career Advising, Learning Services and Analytics, First and Second Year Experiences, Disability Resources, and Student Athlete Development offices. To learn more about these services and supports and how to access them, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/studentsuccess/index.html>.

Campus Resources for Writing:

The Writing Center offers several free in-person and online services including writing and digital writing consultations, virtual presentation audiences, ESL conversation partners, and special-topics workshops for all JSU faculty, staff, and students. A team of undergraduate and graduate consultants are trained to assist with academic, personal, and professional writing. Appointments can be scheduled through the Navigate app. For more information, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/english/jsuwrites/index.html>.

Disabilities Resources:

Jacksonville State University is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you are currently experiencing or anticipate that you will have any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, that may have some impact on your work in this course and for which you may require academic adjustments or accommodations, please work with a staff member in Disability Resources so that accommodations can be considered. Students that receive accommodation letters, or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPPs) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of your accommodations as early in the semester as possible. You can find more information about the Office of Disability Resources on the web or by visiting the Student Success Center on the 2nd Floor of the Houston Cole Library. You may also call (256) 782-8380 or email at disabilityresources@jsu.edu. All discussions will remain confidential.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Military & Post-Traditional Student Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions, please contact (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or at the physical location in the basement of Dauge Hall. If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact your course instructor no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. The instructor may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Title IX:

Jacksonville State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any educational programs or activities and is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education, to uphold Title IX standards. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by and admission to the university. Prohibited activities include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our "Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy." Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at 256.782.5769 or titleix@jsu.edu. If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, they should speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310. For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <https://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

Tutoring resources at JSU:

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane. For more information about tutor.com contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, November 10. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 36 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a **platypus**. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: “Please review the syllabus.” This policy ensures you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

To help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Mrs B i will b submitting the thing late 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment prior to the virtual presentations. By reading the textbook prior to class, you will be able to get the most out of the virtual presentations, clearly see the information that is both the textbook and your professor are highlighting, and understand what changes have occurred to American government since the publication of your textbook.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer, the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later, you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, if you start to think or feel that you are getting lost please contact the professor. It is easier to help you get back on track when issues are starting than after they have grown.

Tentative Virtual Class Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Textbook Reading</u>
8/18	Introduction	No Reading

<i>GUIDING QUESTION: WHAT IS POLITICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE?</i>		
8/21, 23, & 25	What is Political Science & Games Politicians Play	Chapter 1
8/28, 30, & 9/1	Political Science: Components, Tasks, & Controversies	Chapter 3
9/4	Labor Day (learn more here)	No Reading
9/6 & 8	The Physical, Social, & Cultural Environment of Politics	Chapter 4
9/11, 13, 15, & 18	Politics & Choice	Chapter 2
9/20 & 21	SECTION EXAM 1	NO READING
<i>GUIDING QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE TRADITIONAL FIELDS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE?</i>		
9/22, 25, 27, & 29	Political Theory: The Quest for the Good Political Life	Chapter 5
10/2, 4 & 6	American Politics & Government	Chapter 9
10/9, 11, & 13	Comparative Politics	Chapter 10
10/16, 18, & 20	International Politics & the Global Community	Chapter 11
10/23	Short Paper Workday	NO READING
10/25 & 26	SECTION EXAM 2	NO READING
<i>GUIDING QUESTION: WHAT DOES POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDY?</i>		
10/27 & 30	Elections, Representation, & Governance	Chapter 6 (147-59) Chapter 7 (173-76, 183-86)
11/1 & 3	Institutions & Ideology	Chapter 8 (211-19) Chapter 6 (159-61) Chapter 7 (182-83, 191-94)
11/6, 8, & 10	Political Economy & Development	Chapter 14
11/13, 15, & 17	Conflict	Chapter 12 (331-41) Chapter 13 (357-70)
11/20, 22, & 24	THANKSGIVING BREAK (learn more here)	NO READING
11/27 & 29	Justice and Law	Chapter 8 (219-37)
12/1, 2, & 3	SECTION EXAM 3	NO READING
12/4, 5, & 6	FINAL EXAM	NO READING