

# **POLS B121 – Introduction to U.S. Politics**

Spring 2020

Class Meetings: Monday/Thursday 2:40 – 4:00 p.m. (EST)

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## Course Summary

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are constantly interacting with the actions (and sometimes inactions) of the American political system. The American political system governs attempts at collective action and serves as the arena for resolving societal conflict; regulates the air we breathe, food we eat, and even the time we register; establishes and ensures our civil rights and liberties; and forms an important part of our identities. Turbulent times only accentuate those interactions. Despite its ubiquity, the American political system is shrouded in a mythos that often leads to confusion. This class will peel back the layers of this mythos to observe the American political system as it actually is and attempt to explain the difficult “how’s” and “why’s” of the system’s design and functionality.

We will approach the study of the American political system via three broad themes:

- 1) How and why was the American political system designed?
- 2) What are the main institutional pillars of the American political system, how and why were they established, and how and why have they developed/evolved over time?
- 3) How can we, as people both principal and subject to the U.S. government, best exert influence and power within and/or against the confines of the American political system?

At the end of this semester, students should have a broad understanding of how the American political system operates, have developed as writers and as advocates for their arguments, and be prepared to effectively act within our democratic system.

## Course Goals and Expectations

By the end of the semester, students should...

- Understand the principles and compromises underpinning the design of the American political system.
- Be able to evaluate how the American political system matches to theories of governmental efficacy and performance and articulate feasible reforms.

- Be able to identify the core institutional pillars of the American political system, how these pillars have developed and evolved over time, and what roles each plays in governance and politics.
- Understand how the core institutional pillars work with and against each other to create politics and governance.
- Understand how the attitudes and behavior of American citizens is linked to the activities of the core institutional pillars.
- Have reflected on their own political attitudes and behavior and be better prepared to influence American politics in their self-defined interests.
- Developed a level of familiarity with the empirical study of political science.

### Texts

Students are required to obtain the following books:

- Kernell, Samuel H., Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2019 *The Logic of American Politics* (9<sup>th</sup> Ed. – we will not be using the interactive elements)
- Hersh, Eitan. 2020. *Politics is for Power: How to Move Beyond Political Hobbyism, Take Action, and Make Real Change*.

Used and ebook copies of the KJKV textbook are available through the campus bookstore. New copies of the Hersh book are available through the campus bookstore. All other readings for the semester will be made available on Moodle. Students are expected to complete all readings marked “required” before class. Readings marked as “recommended” are purely optional. Students are also expected to stay informed on major political news.

### Classroom Procedure and Etiquette

This class will be taught entirely remotely. I plan on teaching the class primarily synchronously. I reserve the right to switch to a part-synchronous, part-asynchronous format pending developments.

For synchronous sessions, we will be using Zoom. Students should log in to Zoom prior to the start of the class period. Unless asking/answering a question or responding to another student, microphones should be muted to avoid audio feedback.

I am sympathetic that sometimes students would prefer not to turn their cameras on. From the perspective of the person leading the class discussion, visual feedback is an essential heuristic. Being able to see if students are engaged, confused, etc. is vital to conducting a classroom. As such, I am proposing a compromise rule: More than 50% of the students in the class must have their cameras turned on. Class will not begin until we reach that 50% threshold.

Students are expected to participate in open discussions during class and participation will count toward final grades. Use of the “raise hand” option is strongly encouraged to facilitate

unobtrusive discussion. All student participation must be civil and respectful. You are welcome to disagree with a point made by the professor or a fellow student. But you must do so in a manner that avoids condescension and ad hominem or otherwise insulting attacks.

### Assignments and Grading

- Participation: 10%
- Short Papers: 20%
- Take-home Exams: 40%
- Book Report: 15%
- Teaching Presentation: 15%

*Participation* – Learning is not a passive experience. Students are expected to be active contributors in their education by asking questions when they are unsure of a concept, applying critical thinking to the answering of posed questions, and responding civilly to the arguments and perspectives of their fellow students. Most of the demonstration of this active engagement should occur in the classroom. I understand that for personal (or, given the remote nature of this class, technological) reasons some students may struggle with this more than others. While I would gently nudge you to try anyway, I also keep in mind that students can actively contribute to their education during office hours and other interactions with me outside of the (virtual) classroom environment. Additionally, there is a current events discussion board on the course site. Students can post links to news stories there and analyze those stories based on course materials for participation credit.

*Short Papers* – Students will write a total of two short (~2-3 pages double-spaced) papers throughout the semester. The papers will be in response to prompts that are listed on the schedule. There are eight total prompts. You are free to respond to whichever two of those eight. Short papers are graded based on three metrics: argument strength (does the paper advance a clear argument and is that argument made forcefully), logical consistency (are the points of that argument connected to each other in a way that makes sense), and writing quality (is the paper written in a clear and direct manner that is free of grammatical and spelling mistakes). A primer with a more detailed explanation of grading procedures is posted on Moodle.

*Take-home Exams* – There will be two exams in this class. The exams will be posted several days before the identified due date. While the exams will be designed to take ~90 minutes, students may use as much or as little time as they desire. Students may utilize any notes, readings, PowerPoints or other resources that are part of the assigned class materials. Students will take the exams individually, not working in groups. Students may not utilize resources outside those assigned for class (i.e. no Google).

*Book Report* – Students will write a personalized book report on Eitan Hersh's *Politics if for Power*. The book reports should critique the argument advanced in the book and provide self-

analysis of one's own political engagement. A primer with more details on this assignment will be posted on Moodle later on in the semester.

*Teaching Presentation* – Students will identify one common misconception of American politics that we discuss in class and create a short (5-7 minute) pre-recorded presentation that explains why that misconception is wrong. Imagine you are at a gathering (when we can have those again) with friends/family and someone says something about politics that you know is incorrect and you want to provide the correct information in a clear and memorable manner. The use of multimedia elements within the presentation (videos, GIFs, memes, quotes, charts, etc.) is highly encouraged.

## Resources

*Moodle* – The course site contains digital versions of all of the assigned readings for this course and many of the recommended readings as well. Also present on the Moodle site are a series of “primers” – documents meant to provide additional, useful information and tips. Students who are unused to reading academic articles can find a primer that walks through the basic format that most articles utilize. Students who are unfamiliar with typologies of research design (i.e. surveys, experiments, content analysis, etc.) or the basics of quantitative social science (i.e. correlations, linear regression, etc.) can find primers that succinctly present enough to get students up to speed. Additional resources will be added as necessary.

*The Professor* – I am invested in your success in this class and am happy to answer questions or clarify things. I will hold regularly scheduled office hours throughout the semester. These office hours will be via Zoom; a link will be provided at the beginning of the semester. If these hours do not work for you, I also will hold office hours by appointment on weekdays. Email me to schedule a time. Finally, I am happy to answer questions via email. I check my email frequently and will endeavor to respond within a reasonable time frame.

*The TA* – Matangi is also a resource, whether you have a quick question or want to talk through ideas in-depth. You can contact her on groupme or through email ([mmelpakkam@brynmawr.edu](mailto:mmelpakkam@brynmawr.edu)) to ask a question or to set up a meeting time. You can also contact her through the Zoom chat if you have questions during class.

*Classmates* – When I started my graduate program I was told, “You will learn 1/3<sup>rd</sup> from the faculty, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> on your own, and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> from each other.” I have found that, not only was that true for graduate school, it is also a hallmark of a good learning environment at any level. Comprehension often arises from the mutual exchange of ideas and you should work with your classmates to create a communal discussion about the course materials. I promise you: It will help you get the most out of this course.

*Academic Support Services*: Many of us can struggle to handle distractions in a remote learning environment. Developing steady routines for this class will help immeasurably. While I am certainly available to discuss best practices, I also encourage you to reach out to the Academic Support and Learning Resources Specialist to discuss routines, practices, and techniques that will

help you succeed in this class specifically, in college generally, and in life most importantly. For more information, please see: <https://www.brynmawr.edu/academicsupport>

*Writing Center:* Developing strong writing skills will be essential in this class and in life. I encourage you to solicit feedback from the Writing Center, which offers appointments with experienced peer tutors. More information at: <http://www.brynmawr.edu/writingcenter>

## General Policies

*Attendance:* Attendance is imperative to learning. If you miss a class, you miss an opportunity to critically engage with the course materials. Pragmatically, you also miss an opportunity to participate. Failure to attend class will directly hamper your participation grade and indirectly affect your grade through lower comprehension of the core materials. If you have a valid excuse for missing a class, please alert me as soon as you are able (and preferably before class begins) and we will work together to devise a way to prevent you from falling behind.

*Extensions:* If you are unable to submit an assignment by the specified deadline, you should email me immediately with an explanation. I will consider granting extensions on assignments on a case-by-case basis. I am sympathetic to the fact that life happens (i.e. religious holidays, unforeseen accidents or sicknesses, scheduling issues). My sympathy is at its highest if you alert me as soon as you recognize that you may require an extension and diminishes the longer you procrastinate on contacting me.

*Accommodations:* Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at [dalder@brynmawr.edu](mailto:dalder@brynmawr.edu) to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website.

(<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>) Haverford students should contact the Office of Access and Disability Services: [hc-ads@haverford.edu](mailto:hc-ads@haverford.edu) or 610-896-1324. Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

*Integrity:* I am deeply committed to academic honesty as a general principle. I expect students to share that commitment. I encourage students to familiarize themselves with the [Bryn Mawr](#) and [Haverford](#) honor codes. I also encourage students to reflect on the importance of honesty, trust, and respect in their academic endeavors.

*Technology:* Given the nature of remote learning, an intertwining with technology is essential. I expect students to use laptops, tablets, and phones as a resource for learning when class is in session and to avoid being distracted by the wonders of the world wide web.

Part	Topic	Date	Themes	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments Due
Part I: Origins and Development of the U.S. Political System	Syllabus	2/15	*Expectations for the class *Politics as structures (not sport) *Puncturing myths of U.S. politics *The liberal art of political science	1) The syllabus 2) Noel – “Ten Things Political Scientists Know”		
	Politics and Governance	2/18	*What is politics? Government? *Why do we need politics? *What are the differences between rules and norms	1) KJKV Chpt. 1 2) Federalist #10 3) Azari & Smith – “Unwritten Rules”		
	Constitutional Design	2/22	*Why a constitution? *What is the Constitution designed to do? *How does the Constitution allot power and why?	1) KJKV pgs. 49-66, 78-85 2) Federalist #51 3) Constitution – Preamble, Articles I-III	1) SKIM KJKV pgs. 39-49 2) SKIM Articles of Confederation 3) Revolutions podcast series	
	Federalism	2/25	*How do the national and state governments coexist? *Who gets to do what and why?	1) KJKV pgs. 96-107, 120-132 2) Federalist #45 3) Federalist #46 4) Constitution – Articles IV and VI	1) SKIM KJKV pgs. 107-120	Short Paper prompt: Would our political system work better if more power was vested in the national government? Explain why or why not.
	Civil Liberties	3/1	*What is the government not allowed to do? *What are our civil liberties? *How ambiguous are our civil liberties?	1) KJKV pgs. 197-227 2) Constitution – Bill of Rights, 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment 3) <i>Griswold v. CT</i>	1) SKIM KJKV 186-197	
	Civil Rights	3/4	*What is our government obligated to protect? *What has led our government to accept these obligations?	1) KJKV pgs. 135-139, 156-167, 173-182 2) MLK – “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” 3) Malcolm X – “The Ballot or the Bullet”	1) Rest of KJKV Chapter 5 2) <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> 3) <i>Brown v. Board of Ed.</i>	

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	Evaluating the U.S. System	3/8	*How democratic is the U.S. Constitution? *Could the foundations of U.S. politics be improved?	1) Dahl – How Democratic is the U.S. Constitution?, chpt. 3 & 5 2) Constitution– Article V 3) KJKV pgs. 66-69	1) Pierson & Schickler – “Madison’s Constitution Under Stress”	Short Paper prompt: If you could compel the adoption of one amendment to the U.S. Constitution, what would it be and why?
Part II: Core Institutions of U.S. Political and Governance Systems	Congress	3/11	*What powers does Congress possess? *Who are the Members of Congress (MCs)? *What are the motivations of MCs?	1) KJKV pgs. 235-257 2) Constitution – Article I 3) Lee – Insecure Majorities, chpt. 3	1) Arnold – The Logic of Congressional Action, chpt. 1 2) Fenno – “U.S. House Members in their Districts”	Take-home Exam 1 Due by 11:59 p.m., EST
		3/15	*How does the legislative process work? *How has the legislative process changed over time?	1) KJKV pgs. 276-294 2) Sinclair – Unorthodox Lawmaking, chpt. 6 3) Klein – “The Definitive Case for Ending the Filibuster”	1) SKIM KJKV pgs. 267-275 2) Sinclair–Unorthodox Lawmaking, chpt. 1 2) Koger–Filibustering, chpt. 2	Short Paper prompt: What would the repercussions of ending the filibuster be? Would ending the filibuster make the Senate more functional?
	Presidency	3/18	*What powers does the president possess? *How has the office of the presidency developed? *What makes a presidency successfully?	1) KJKV pgs. 299-317 2) Constitution – Article II 3) Skowronek – Presidential Leadership in Political Time, chpt. 7 4) Golberg – “ <a href="#">The First Post-Reagan Presidency</a> ”	1) Wildavsky – “The Two Presidencies” 2) Canes-Wrone et al. – “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power” 3) Azari – Delivering the People’s Message, Introduction	
3/22		*What are the more informal powers of the presidency? *How do presidents interact with other political actors?	1) KJKV pgs. 317-340 2) Kernell – Going Public, chpt. 3	1) Baum and Kernell – “Has Cable Ended ...”		
	Bureaucracy	3/25	*How has the federal bureaucracy changed over time and what does it look like now?	1) KJKV pgs. 355-381 2) Golden – “Deregulation Drains Government...”	1) Rumsfeld’s War 2) OTM – Why the FBI and CIA ...	

Part	Topic	Date	Themes	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments Due	
			*How does the bureaucracy balance representation with expertise? *How do the cultures of agencies develop and interact? *How does the bureaucracy interact with other political entities?	3) Bearfield & Golden – “Resolved, Bring Back the Spoils System” 4) McCubbins & Schwartz–“Congressional Oversight Overlooked”	3) Wilson–Bureaucracy chpt 1 & 2 4) Science of Politics - Presidential appointments 5) Lipton – “Trump Issues Order Giving Him More Leeway to Hire and Fire Federal Workers” 6) Ogrysko – <a href="#"><u>“Biden repeals Schedule F...”</u></a>		
		3/29	<b>SPRING PAUSE – NO CLASS</b>				
	Courts	4/1	*What powers does the Supreme Court possess? *How effective is the Supreme Court at influencing politics?	1) KJKV pgs. 402-428 2) Constitution – Article III 3) Rosenberg – The Hollow Hope, Introduction & chpt. 1	1) SKIM rest of KJKV 2) <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> 3) Scalia – “Originalism” 4) Brennan – “The Constitution of the United States” 5) Souter – “Harvard Commencement Address” 6) <i>Dred Scott</i> 7) <i>Shelby County v. Holder</i> 8) “The Case of the Spelucean Explorers”		
	Parties	4/5	*Why parties? *Why only two parties?	1) KJKV pgs. 516-525 2) Drutman – Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop, chpt. 1 & 9	1) SKIM KJKV pgs. 525-548 2) Drutman – Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop, chpt. 8	Short Paper prompt: What are the advantages and disadvantages to a two-party system? What changes would you prescribe to	



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						improve to address the disadvantages?
		4/8	*Who/what do the modern parties represent? *Is there “a dime of difference” between the two parties?	1) KJKV pgs. 548-559 2) Azari – “Weak Parties and Strong Partisanship” 3) Grossman & Hopkins – Asymmetric Politics, chpt. 1	1) Masket – Learning from Loss chpt. 3	
	Interest Groups and Social Movements	4/12	*How much influence do special interests have over politics? *What means do special interests have to influence politics?	1) KJKV pgs. 563-587 2) Hall & Deardorff – “Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy”	1) Schnakenberg – “Informational Lobbying and Legislative Voting”	Short Paper prompt: Agree or disagree (and explain your answer) with the following statement: Interest groups are necessary to make sure everyone’s voice is heard in government.
		4/15	*How do we differentiate between special interests and social movements? *How do social movements influence politics?	1) KJKV pgs. 587-603 2) Skocpol & Williamson – The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism chpt. 3	1) Politics in Question podcast with Omar Wasow	
Part III: Linkages between the People and the Politics	Media	4/19	*Who are journalists? *How does the media make news? *How does the media interact with political elites?	1) KJKV pgs. 616-632 3) Bennett et al. – When the Press Fails, chpt. 1	1) SKIM KJKV pgs. 607-616 2) Weaver et al. – “American Journalist in a Digital Age” 3) White – “The Gatekeeper” 4) Harcup & O’Neal – “What is News” 5) Dunaway – “Markets, Ownership, and the Quality of Campaign News Coverage”	Take-home Exam #2 due by 11:59 p.m.

Part	Topic	Date	Themes	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments Due
		4/22	<p>*How does the news we consume affect us?</p> <p>*What does the news we choose say about us?</p>	<p>1) KJKV pgs. 632-641</p> <p>2) Prior – “News vs. Entertainment”</p> <p>3) Taber &amp; Lodge – “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs”</p>	<p>1) Iyengar &amp; Kinder – News that Matters, chpt. 7 &amp; 8</p> <p>2) Feezell – “Agenda Setting through Social Media”</p> <p>3) Nyhan – “Facts and Myths about Misperceptions”</p>	<p>Short Paper prompt: Have the changes in the media ecosystem over the past few decades helped or hurt American politics? Explain your answer.</p>
	Public Opinion	4/26	<p>*What is public opinion and how do we measure it?</p> <p>*Do people have strong, consistent attitudes toward politics?</p>	<p>1) KJKV pgs. 431-448</p> <p>2) Kinder &amp; Kalmoe – Neither Liberal nor Conservative, chpts. 1 &amp; 4</p>	<p>1) Nelson et al. – “Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict”</p> <p>2) Zaller – The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, chpts. 1 &amp; 2</p>	
		4/29	<p>*What are the most salient divisions in public opinion?</p> <p>*How do people’s social networks affect their views on politics?</p>	<p>1) KJKV pgs. 448-454, 466-471</p> <p>2) Mason – Uncivil Agreement, chpt. 1</p> <p>3) White &amp; Laird – Steadfast Democrats, chpt. 3</p>	<p>1) Jardina – White Identity Politics, chpt. 2</p> <p>2) Kinder &amp; Sanders – Divided by Color, chpt. 5</p> <p>3) Dawson – Black Visions, chpt. 1</p> <p>4) Page &amp; Shapiro – The Rational Public, chpt. 1</p>	
	Voting and Campaigns	5/3	<p>*Why do people vote?</p> <p>*How do people decide for whom to vote?</p>	<p>1) KJKV pgs. 475-488</p> <p>2) Achen and Bartels – Democracy for Realists, chpt. 5</p>	<p>1) Achen and Bartels – Democracy for Realists, chpt. 1</p> <p>2) Klar &amp; Krupnikov – Independent Politics, chpt. 5</p> <p>3) Campbell et al. – The American Voter, chpts. 4 &amp; 5</p>	<p>Short Paper prompt: Should America adopt a compulsory voting system (where voters must submit a ballot or pay a small fine)? Why or why not?</p>

Part	Topic	Date	Themes	Required Readings	Recommended Readings	Assignments Due
		5/6	*What are campaigns trying to achieve and are they effective? * Can campaign victories be bought?	1) KJKV pgs. 488-509 2) Geer – In Defense of Negativity, chpt. 1	1) Sides et al. – Identity Crisis, chpt. 8 2) Green & Gerber – Get Out the Vote, chpt. 3	
	Americans and Democracy	5/10	*Do people like the American political system? *Can we keep our Republic?	1) Hibbing & Theiss-Morse – Stealth Democracy, chpt. 6 2) Bartels – “Ethnic Antagonism ...” 3) Mason & Kalmoe – <a href="#"><u>“What You Need to Know about How Many Americans Condone Political Violence”</u></a> 4) Levendusky & Stecula – “Why There’s Hope”	1) KJKV pgs. 454-459 2) Graham & Slovic – “Democracy in America?” 3) Hibbing & Theiss-Morse – Stealth Democracy, chpt. 5 4) Finkel et al. – “Political Sectarianism in America”	Short Paper prompt: Is Americans’ commitment to democratic principles sufficient to maintain the political system? If not, what can be done to rectify the problem?
	Political Hobbyism and Real Political Activism	5/13	*Given the political system that exists, how can we best achieve our political goals?	1) Hersh – Politics is for Power		Book report due by 11:59 p.m., EST

## Teaching Presentations Due – Date TBA