



**Political Science (POL) 121  
American Politics:  
Reforming a Nation**

**Davidson College**

**Fall 2016**

Class Times: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

Class Location: Chambers 1062

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*This course has no pre-requisites, and counts toward the Social Scientific Thought Distribution Requirement and fulfills the Political Science Major Requirement that all POL majors take at least one course in the sub-field of American Politics.*

## Course Overview

This course, American Politics 121, provides an *overview of politics in the United States*, with a particular focus on the processes and actors driving – and hindering – the reform of the American federal government and the policies it produces. The course is designed to provide students with not only an understanding of the *foundations* and *institutions* of the American political system, but also the *political behavior* of voters, politicians, and interest groups within that system. It also aims to expose students to relevant social science and political science concepts that are relevant to American politics. And it teaches students to apply these concepts to a wide range of *current political controversies* relating to both institutional and policy reform efforts. The course should therefore be challenging and engaging for both prospective political science majors and non-majors. A core question that we will be discussing throughout the course relates to *the logic of collective action* – despite the odds against it, how do people come together to make reform happen in America?



## Course Learning Outcomes

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This course is designed to contribute to four overarching learning outcomes, which are described below. Readings, lectures, discussions and assignments are all designed to help students achieve these goals. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- **Theoretical Knowledge of the Social Sciences:** To describe particular social science and political science theories and concepts and how they explain human cognition and behavior and the structures of human societies and institutions.
- **Empirical Knowledge of American Politics:** To summarize the key features of American political institutions, political behavior, and policymaking.
- **Application Skills:** To classify and compare specific characteristics of American politics using social science and political science theories and concepts.
- **Analytical Skills:** To analyze and evaluate claims made about American politics using theoretical and empirical knowledge from the social sciences.

By achieving these learning outcomes, students will be empowered to think critically about their own political values and positions, make informed political choices, and to positively, strategically, and successfully engage in American democracy – as citizens, advocates, and leaders.

I have designed this syllabus to help us accomplish these outcomes. I aim for our classes to be engaging and well-organized, our lectures, discussions, and group activities to be focused and productive, and our texts to be informative and thought-provoking. Assignments will also help us meet these objectives, and assess our progress towards them. I will therefore work to provide constructive feedback and fair grades on them in a timely manner (my goal is to have them back to you within two weeks of submission). I will be available for help outside of class in office hours and by appointment every week for anyone with questions about the material covered in the course.

## Course Structure and Format

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The first part of the course focuses on the **foundations** of the American political system – the Constitution, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights – from which significant reform, short of revolution, must be based. The second part focuses on the dynamics of **political behavior** within this system and its relationship to reform, starting with public opinion and moving to campaigns, elections, and the news media. Part III of the course analyzes the roles of the major **political institutions** in America – the States, Congress, the Presidency, the Federal Judiciary, the Bureaucracy, Political Parties, and Interest Groups – and looks at their role in promoting (or resisting) reform. In light of all of these topics covered, the fourth and final part of the course discusses the prospects for future significant reforms of the American political system and the policies it implements.



Most weeks will be dedicated to a specific topic, such as Public Opinion or Congress. Within each week, we will generally follow a regular pattern of class activities. **On Mondays and Wednesdays**, we will discuss the overarching topic of the week, building on the readings from the primary textbook, *The Logic of American Politics*. In these discussions, we will make connections to current debates and events occurring within the American political system. **On most Fridays**, we will all participate in a role-playing “simulation” of a political debate also related to the topic of the week. Two to four students will advocate for or against particular reforms and represent different perspectives on the issue in question. The rest of the class will also actively participate in these simulations.

## Course Scope

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The sections above provide an overview of what is covered in the course, but it is also important to outline what it does not cover. First of all, it is primarily a survey course of American politics, and therefore does not focus on any one topic or issue. For example, the course covers the basics of the Presidency, but will not provide as much in-depth analysis of this institution as POL 312 (The Presidency). The course also focuses on American domestic politics and processes, and is designed not to overlap with POL 130 (Comparative Politics), POL 141 (International Politics), or POL 345 (American Foreign Policy). The course will touch on relevant historical events and examples, but other classes in the History Department (e.g. HIS 141, HIS 142) are more squarely oriented towards the study of American history. While we will discuss political science concepts and research, the course is not designed to be an introduction to social science methods, which is the focus of POL 201. Finally, it is not designed to duplicate high school AP U.S. Government and Politics courses. The inclusion of theories and concepts from the social science (and political science in particular), the focus on the processes of reform, and the simulation of political debates promise to make the course new and challenging for all students, regardless of whether they have taken related AP classes.



## Course Requirements (Assignments and Grading)

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The assignments for this course are designed to help students accomplish the course's learning objectives. They include the following activities:

- **Participation (15%):** This course is designed for active student involvement and participation. For each day's class, I expect students to complete the assigned reading and to come to class prepared to discuss that reading. Participation grades will be based on your preparation for class, your careful attention to assigned readings, your engagement with relevant current events, the quality of your contributions, your respect for the ideas and remarks of others in the class, the relevance of your remarks, and your overall level of participation (both active and passive) in the classroom.
- **Debate Presentation (15%):** Each student will be a member of a two-three person debate team. Each student on the team will be responsible for presenting a particular perspective in one debate over the course of the semester. Other members of the team will provide written and oral feedback to the student on their prepared remarks and help them prepare for the question-and-answer period of the debate. Course readings for the day of the debate will provide basic background for the debate, but teams are expected to conduct additional research on their topic to supplement their arguments. Prepared remarks, feedback from other team members, an outline of possible questions and answers, and a bibliography of additional references used are due at the beginning of the debate.
- **Analytical Paper (15%):** Each student will write one short paper (4 pages doubled-spaced) analyzing an important controversy in American politics. The topic must be submitted for approval, and must be different from the student's debate topics. These papers should apply the broader political theories and concepts covered during the course – and in particular in Chapter 1 of the Logic textbook – to its analysis of the issue.
- **Quizzes (10%):** Students will complete five in-class quizzes. These quizzes are given approximately every two weeks over the course of the semester, and will have 10-15 questions on them. Some, but not all, of the questions will come from the online quizzes provided on the current version of the *Logic of American Politics* website (see link below).

- **Mid-Term Review (20%):** A Mid-Term Review covering Part I and Part II of the course will be held during the seventh week of the course. The class before the review will be devoted to a discussion of the political themes and dynamics discussed so far in the semester and any questions that students have. The Mid-Term Review will include both an in-class and take-home component.
- **Final Review (25%):** A Final Review will be held during the Exam period. The Final Review will include a mix of identifications, short answer questions, and essays, and will be cumulative, covering all of the material in the course, although with more emphasis on Parts III and IV.

## Course Materials

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Two texts are required for the course, and are available at the campus bookstore:

1. Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. 2015. *The Logic of American Politics*. CQ Press. 7th edition.
2. David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. 2014. *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. W. W. Norton and Company. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.



*The Logic of American Politics*, which I will abbreviate as *Logic* in the class, provides an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of American politics, and we will be using it extensively throughout the course. The supplementary website (<https://edge.sagepub.com/kernell7e>) provides a wide range of useful student resources, including practice quizzes, flashcards, and more. *Fault Lines* is a collection of articles related to a range of different issues in American politics. Be sure to use the most recent editions.

## Course Website

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A few additional readings that are not from these two books will be either posted on Moodle or handed out in class. Please visit the course website on Moodle regularly for information about the course, including the syllabus, links to readings not in the textbook, paper assignments, and contact information. The web site can be accessed at [moodle.davidson.edu](http://moodle.davidson.edu).

## Current Events

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As we will be applying the concepts and ideas from the course to current events in American politics, students are expected to read the news daily and stay up on what is going on in the world. The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and PBS NewsHour are acceptable outlets of both national and international information, and can be accessed online. Discount subscriptions for students to the New York Times and Wall Street Journal are available via their websites. We will regularly discuss how current political debates and events relate to what we are learning in the course. And each week I will distribute at least one article about current events in American politics for us to discuss collectively in class.





**Course Outline of Topics, Readings, and Assignments**

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A detailed outline of the course’s topics, readings and assignments is provided below. Please note that I reserve the right to make modifications to this outline if in my judgment the flow of the course will be best served by such adjustments.

**PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN POLITICAL REFORM**

**Week 1: Understanding the Nature of Politics**

M	22-Aug	Introduction to the Course	No Reading Due	-	-
W	24-Aug	The Logic of American Politics	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. “The Logic of American Politics,” 1-35.	35	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 1
F	26-Aug	The Constitution	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. “The Constitution,” 39-64.	25	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 2

**Week 2: The Constitution and Civil Liberties**

M	29-Aug	The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Debate	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. “The Constitution,” 65-79.	14	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 2
			John Roche. 1961. “The Founding Fathers: A Reform Caucus in Action,” in <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 55 (4): 799-816.	17	<i>Moodle</i>
			Brutus. 1787. Anti-Federalist No. 3.	5	<i>Moodle</i>
			James Madison. 1787. <i>Federalist</i> No. 10.	7	<i>Logic</i> , App. 4
			James Madison. 1788. <i>Federalist</i> No. 51.	3	<i>Logic</i> , App. 5
W	31-Aug	Civil Liberties	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. “Civil Liberties,” 173-197.	25	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 5
F	02-Sept	Civil Liberties	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. “Civil Liberties,” 198-211.	14	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 5

**Week 3: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**

M	05-Sep	Civil Rights	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, “Civil Rights,” 123-132.	9	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 5
			Adam Swift, “Liberty.” In <i>Political Philosophy: A Beginner’s Guide for Students and Politicians</i> , 51-68.	17	<i>Moodle</i>
W	07-Sep	Civil Rights	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, “Civil Rights,” 133-157.	24	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 5
F	09-Sep	Civil Rights	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, “Civil Rights,” 158-168. <b>QUIZ #1</b>	11	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 5
			Amy Guttman and Dennis Thompson. Selection from “Deliberative Democracy,” 1-21.	21	<i>Moodle</i>

**PART II: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR AND REFORM**

**Week 4: Public Opinion**

M	12-Sep	Public Opinion	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Public Opinion," 399-422. <b>PAPER TOPIC DUE</b>	19	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 10
W	14-Sep	Public Opinion	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Public Opinion," 423-438.	16	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 10
			Kirby Goidel, Brian Smentkowskia, and Craig Freeman, "Perceptions of Threat to Religious Liberty," 426-432.	6	<i>Moodle</i>
F	16-Sep	<i>Political Culture</i>	Eric Liu, Steven Warshawski, and Daniel Elazar, "Political Culture: What Does It Mean to Be an American?"	29	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 1

**Week 5: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections**

M	19-Sep	Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Voting, Campaigns, and Elections," 443-458.	16	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 11
			Andrew Ballard, Sunshine Hillygus, and Tobias Konitzer, "Campaigning Online: Web Display Ads in the 2012 Presidential Campaign," 414-419.	6	<i>Moodle</i>
W	21-Sep	Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Voting, Campaigns, and Elections," 459-479. <b>QUIZ #2</b>	21	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 11
F	23-Sep	<i>Voter ID Laws</i>	Chandler Davidson, Hans Von Spakovsky, and Edward B. Foley, "Elections and Voting: Voter Identification," 182-199.	18	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 10

**Week 6: The News Media**

M	26-Sep	The News Media	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The News Media," 567-589.	23	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 14
W	28-Sep	The News Media	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The News Media," 590-606.	17	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 14
F	30-Sep	<i>Income Inequality</i>	Timothy Noah and Richard Epstein, "Government and the Economy: Is Income Inequality a Problem?" 251-265.	15	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 13

**Week 7: Part I and II Synthesis and Review**

M	03-Oct	Part I and II Synthesis	Part I and II Summary and Discussion	-	-
W	05-Oct	Part I and II Review	Mid-Term Review (In-Class Component)	-	-
F	07-Oct	Part I and II Review	Mid-Term Review (Take-Home Component; Due @ 5 pm)	-	-

**PART III: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND REFORM**

**Week 8: Federalism**

M	10-Oct		FALL BREAK		
W	12-Oct	Federalism	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Federalism," 83-118.	36	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 3
F	14-Oct	<i>Immigration</i>	Jay Sekulow, Richard Peltz-Steele, and Kevin Johnson, "Federalism: Immigration Reform and State Power," 58-70	13	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 3

**Week 9: Congress**

M	17-Oct	Congress	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Congress," 214-240.	27	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 6
			<i>U.S. Constitution</i> , Article I.	3	<i>Logic</i> , App. 3
F	19-Oct	Congress	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Congress," 241-271. <b>QUIZ #3</b>	31	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 6
W	21-Oct	<i>Congressional Earmarks</i>	Cato Handbook for Policymakers, Brian Friel, and Jonathan Rauch, "Congress: Pork-Barrel Politics," 89-103.	15	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 5

**Week 10: The Presidency**

M	24-Oct	The Presidency	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The P residency," 275-293.	19	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 7
			<i>U.S. Constitution</i> , Article II.	1	<i>Logic</i> , App. 3
W	26-Oct	The Presidency	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The Presidency," 294-313.	20	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 7
F	28-Oct	<i>Health Care Reform</i>	Marilyn Werber Serafini, Yuval Levin, and George Condon, "Government and Society: Health Care Reform," 267-287. <b>PAPERS DUE AT 5 PM</b>	21	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 14

**Week 11: The Federal Judiciary**

M	31-Oct	The Federal Judiciary	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The Federal Judiciary," 359-377.	19	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 9
			Alexander Hamilton, <i>Federalist</i> , No. 78.	7	<i>Moodle</i>
W	02-Nov		Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The Federal Judiciary," 378-395.	18	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 9
			<i>U.S. Constitution</i> , Article III <b>QUIZ #4</b>	3	<i>Logic</i> , App. 3
F	04-Nov	<i>Originalism</i>	Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer, "The Judiciary: Interpreting the Constitution – Originalism or a Living Constitution?" 133-157.	25	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 8

**Week 12: The Bureaucracy**

M	07-Nov	The Bureaucracy	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The Bureaucracy," 317-338.	20	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 8
W	09-Nov	The Bureaucracy	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "The Bureaucracy," 339-355.	17	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 8
F	11-Nov	<i>Privatization</i>	Janine Wedel and Cato Handbook for Policymakers, "Bureaucracy: Privatization or Government Activity," 115-132.	18	<i>Reform</i> , Ch. 17

**Week 13: Interest Groups**

M	14-Nov	Interest Groups	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Interest Groups," 529-546.	17	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 13
W	16-Nov	Interest Groups	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Interest Groups," 548-563. <b>QUIZ #5</b>	17	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 13
F	18-Nov	<i>Citizens United</i>	Ronald Dworkin, Bradley Smith, and Matt Bai, "Groups and Interests: Corporate and Labor Spending in Campaigns," 228-250.	23	<i>Fault Lines</i> , Ch. 12

**Week 14: Thanksgiving**

NO CLASS

**Week 15: Political Parties**

M	28-Nov	Political Parties	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Political Parties," 483-503.	21	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 12
W	30-Nov	Political Parties	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Political Parties," 504-525.	22	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 12
F	02-Dec	<i>Non-Partisan Redistricting</i>	Michael McDonald and Justin Buchler, "Resolved, the re-districting process should be nonpartisan."	20	<i>Moodle</i>

**PART IV: SYNTHESIS AND REVIEW**

**Week 16: American Politics and Reform**

M	05-Dec	Looking Forward	Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, "Is There a Logic to American Policy?" 608-630.	23	<i>Logic</i> Ch. 15
W	07-Dec	Looking Back	Evaluations and Review Session	-	-

*Note: For more information about course expectations and policies, see the accompanying document, "General Course Policies."*