

POLI-2051: American Government

Professor Brian Hamel

Fall 2021

Class Hours & Room:

9: T/TH, 12:00-1:20 PM, 221 Tureaud Hall

Email: brianhamel@lsu.edu

10: T/TH, 9-10:20 AM, 54 Allen Hall

Office Hours: T, 2:30-4:30 PM; by appointment

Website: <https://bit.ly/2TBDHXf>

Office: 217 Stubbs Hall

Course Description

This course will introduce you to the fundamentals of American government and politics. The course is divided into four sections. First, we will focus on the **foundations** of American government: the Constitution, federalism, and civil rights and liberties. The second section explores aspects of political **behavior** and psychology in the mass public, including public opinion, political participation, campaigns and elections, and social groups and identities. Third, we will study political **institutions** like the U.S. Congress, interest groups, the presidency, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the news media. We will close the semester with a brief introduction to U.S. economic, social, and foreign **policy**.

Along the way, this course will introduce you to political *science* and the analytical study of politics. Political science is about describing and explaining politics. It seeks to identify facts and patterns in the political world and figure out why we see those patterns. Why do some citizens vote, while others do not? How well does public policy reflect the policy preferences of the public? Does money “buy” the votes of members of Congress? These are just a few of the questions that we will tackle this semester. Our approach to doing so will be distinct from that of pundits on cable news. Rather than rely on anecdote or personal opinion, we will rely on data and evidence, and conceptual frameworks such as collection action, to understand our politics. By the end of the semester, you will be a more informed and critical consumer and analyst of political news and event and will be prepared for more advanced coursework in political science and other empirical social sciences.

Integrative Learning Core

Integrated learning allows students to make simple connections among ideas and experiences and across disciplines and perspectives. The LSU Integrative Learning Core (ILC) curriculum is designed to develop student abilities to transfer their learning to new situations and demonstrate a sense of self as a learner. A fundamental goal of the ILC is to foster students’ practical and intellectual capacities associated with integrative learning in preparation for high competence and functionality in their post-baccalaureate careers. This course fulfills the BOR Area of

Social/Behavioral Sciences and provides students experience with the ILC proficiency of *Inquiry and Analysis*.

Required Materials

Students are required to rent or purchase the following textbook:

Kollman, Ken. 2019. *The American Political System*. 3rd Edition, 2018 Election Update. New York: W.W. Norton.

Be sure that you do not purchase the “core” 3rd edition.

The LSU library has digital and paperback versions available for both rent and purchase, but your cheapest option is to rent a digital copy directly from [Norton](#).

Note that although previous editions of the book are still on the market, I will be teaching out of the 3rd edition. Exam questions may be drawn from the 3rd edition, and you will be responsible for that material whether you have purchased the 3rd edition or not. Use earlier editions at your own risk.

Course Assignments and Grades

Your final grade will be based on three assignments:

Assignment	Percent	Dates
Two Exams	35% each	10/19; 12/6 or 12/9
“Make an Argument” Essay	20%	11/9
Four Memes	2.5% each	9/9; 10/12; 11/16; 11/30

- Two Exams (35% each): There will be two in-class exams. The first exam will cover material from the sections on **foundations** and **behavior**. The second will cover **institutions** and **policy**. The exams will cover material from the readings as well as my lectures. Both exams will include a mixture of multiple choice and short essay questions. Both exams will be closed book/note exams. A study guide will be provided to you one week prior to the exam date.
- “Make an Argument” Essay (20%): You will write a double-spaced, 2-4 page (500-1,000 word) essay responding to the following prompt:

Is the mass public polarized? Or sorted? Are political elites (e.g., members of Congress) polarized?

The goal of the paper is to get you used to crafting a clear and concise argument using data and evidence rather than your personal opinion. You must make a clear argument – i.e., “Americans are polarized, not sorted” or “Political elites are polarized, but the mass public is not” – and back up your claim with scholarly sources. We will cover this topic extensively in readings and in lecture, and you will be able to form your argument on the basis of the material we discuss. More information will be provided later in the semester.

- Four Memes (2.5% each): Memes are a fun way to take complex ideas and translate them into engaging and easily understood information. At the end of each course section, you will create one original meme based on something you learned during that section. You should start with an appropriate popular meme – for instance, distracted boyfriend or condescending Wonka – and add text to the meme that conveys the idea, concept, theory, or finding from the course that you wish to explain. You can use any one of many online meme generators. Have fun with it! We will look at some examples on the first day of class.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Percentage Grade</u>
A+	97-100%
A	93-96%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	0-59%

I will round final averages. In other words, if your final average is 89.5, you will receive an A-. If your final average is 89.4, you will receive a B+.

Course Policies and Procedures

COVID-19

Your health and safety are of utmost importance. Though our class is not large enough for hybrid instruction, I am taking several steps to ensure the well-being of our class. **First and most obviously, you should not come to class if you feel sick – even just a little bit.** Even if you suspect

you may have been exposed to COVID-19, you should not come to class. Unfortunately, some of you may need to quarantine at some point during the semester and miss several classes. To keep everyone on track, I will be recording my lectures and posting these to Moodle after class. These recorded lectures are also available to students who simply do not feel comfortable coming to in-person lectures regularly.

The [Presidential Directive on COVID-19 Safety](#) requires that masks or face coverings are worn in class at all times. I will enforce this policy during class. Failure to comply will be addressed through the university's student conduct process.

LSU *strongly* encourages all students, faculty, and staff to get vaccinated for COVID-19. [You can get vaccinated on campus](#). Vaccination helps keep our campus community safe, helps protect those among us who are most vulnerable to COVID-19, and is our path back to more normal operations and the full college experience that our students deserve.

Contacting Me

The fastest way to reach me is via email. When emailing me, please include "POLI-2051:" followed by a brief description of your question or concern in the subject line of the email. Your email should be professional and should include a greeting such as "Dear Professor Hamel." You are also encouraged to visit me in-person (wearing a mask) during my office hours or by appointment. To schedule an appointment, please email me. I am also available to meet over Zoom (by appointment). I very much welcome the opportunity to meet each of you, learn about your background and interests, and talk politics!

Technology in Class

No laptops or cell phones in class. [Research indicates that laptop use in class has a negative effect on learning and course performance](#). I encourage you to take notes in class using a pen and paper.

Late Assignments

You will be penalized for late assignments or missed exams unless the absence/delay is excused. Valid excuses include illness, serious family emergency, and religious holidays. I am very willing to be flexible and accommodate reasonable requests for extensions, but you must contact me in advance to do so. The penalty for unexcused late assignments is five percentage points per day. For example, if the quality of your work earned you a 95 on an assignment but you turned the assignment in two days late, you would receive an 85 for the assignment.

Grade Disputes

You must wait a minimum of 24 hours after receiving a graded assignment before contacting me regarding your grade. If you wish to dispute your grade, you must do so via email within one week of the date that grades are made available to the class. Grade disputes will not be

considered if submitted past the one-week statute of limitations. When requesting reconsideration of a grade, you should provide a clear explanation as to why a different grade is in order. When work is reviewed for a grade dispute, the grade may be left unchanged, raised, or lowered.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in disciplinary action. The LSU Code of Student Conduct defines plagiarism as “the unacknowledged inclusion, in work submitted for credit, or someone else’s words, ideas, or data.” Please review the University’s [guidelines on academic integrity](#). Examples of academic dishonesty include cheating on exams, plagiarizing, buying or selling assignments, altering grades, intentional deception, and collaborating with others without permission. I reserve the right to investigate when I suspect a violation of any of these policies. All violations of the university’s academic conduct policies are turned over to the Dean of Students.

Accommodations for Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities. Please contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss any such accommodations for this course. In order to have any accommodations met, you must be registered with the LSU Office of Disability Serviced located in 124 Johnston Hall. They can be reached at 225-578-5919. More information on registering and accommodation is available on the [ODS website](#).

Writing Services

CxC Communication Support offers LSU undergraduates one-on-one sessions on their writing. CxC is staffed by undergraduates who are trained to help at any stage of the writing process and with writing assignments from across the university curriculum. Mentors tailor appointments to the concerns of each writer. You can learn more about CxC’s services on their [website](#).

Tips for Success

- Read the syllabus carefully – several times. This syllabus is our contract and your best friend in this course. It outlines my expectations of you, how I will evaluate your performance, and tells you exactly which readings and assignments are due and when. While I will remind you of important deadlines, it is ultimately your responsibility to complete the assigned work ahead on time. If you read this before the start of class on August 24, please send me an email with a photo for your dog or your favorite dog meme or GIF for two extra credit points on your final grade.

- Do the assigned readings and come to/watch class. The textbook provides a foundation for understanding a given topic. My lectures are designed to supplement and expand on the reading. There will be material that is in the textbook but not in my lectures. Likewise, there will be topics covered in my lectures that are not covered in the textbook. Come exam time, you are responsible for both the textbook and lecture material. Blow off the reading or skip lectures at your own peril.
- Use the textbook resources. The textbook comes with a “coursepack” that includes review material, chapter quizzes, Data Exploration exercises, and video exercises. You will find all of these resources on Moodle. The chapter quizzes are a great way to figure out which topics you may need to spend additional time studying.
- Pay attention to current events. I will often tie topics discussed in lectures and discussions to current events. Keeping up with the news is a helpful way to stay engaged in the course and will allow you to make connections on your own. I recommend purchasing a student subscription to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.
- Ask questions. While participation is not a part of your grade, you are encouraged to interrupt me during class and ask questions. There is a good chance someone else has the same as you, too. Additionally, many of you may be reading scientific research for the first time. There will be some growing pains. I am here to help you but can only do so if you ask.

Schedule

This schedule is tentative and subject to change. The most recent version of the syllabus will always be on Moodle. Readings labeled “Chapt.” are from the Kollman textbook. Links to non-textbook readings are either provided below (in blue) or made available as PDFs on Moodle.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment
8/24	Introduction		
8/26	Collective Action	Chapt. 1	
I. FOUNDATIONS			
8/31	Constitution: How Did We Get Here?	Chapt. 2	
9/2	Federalism	Chapt. 3, pp. 71-90 & 99-104	
9/7	State and Local Government	Chapt. 3., pp. 91-98; Anzia ; O'Connell ; Rosenhall	
9/9	Civil Rights and Liberties	Chapt. 4; Reny	Foundations Meme
II. BEHAVIOR			
9/14	Public Opinion: Is It Real?	Chapt. 9, pp. 327-332 & 341-364; Agadjanian	
9/16	Public Opinion: Does It Even Matter?	Chapt. 9, pp. 364-371; Gilens; Lax	
9/21	Participation	Chapt. 10; Enos; Gerber	
9/23	Campaigns and Elections	Chapt. 13; Matthews ; Sides	
9/28	Science (and Art) of Polling	Chapt. 9, pp. 333-340; Collins ; Edelman; Panagopoulos	
9/30	Parties: Why Parties?	Chapt. 12	
10/5	Parties: Are We Polarized?	Fiorina; Aschwanden	
10/7	Groups and Identities	Cramer ; Hochschild; Illing	
10/12	Hearing the Other Side	Mutz	Behavior Meme
10/14	Exam #1 Review		Exam #1
10/19			
10/21	No Class: Fall Holiday		
III. INSTITUTIONS			
10/26	Media	Chapt. 14; Darr ; Mitchell	
10/28	Congress: Who Runs and Who Wins?	Chapt. 5, pp. 151-164; Lawless; Sides	
11/2	Congress: Making the Sausage	Chapt. 5, pp. 165-197; Willis ; Curry	
11/4	Interest Groups	Chapt. 11; Sides	
11/9	Presidency	Chapt. 6	Essay
11/11	Bureaucracy	Chapt. 7	
11/16	Judiciary	Chapt. 8; Chotiner; Thomson-DeVeaux	Institutions Meme
IV. POLICY			
11/18	Economic Policy	Chapt. 15	
11/23	Social Policy	Chapt. 16; Campbell; Sherman	
11/25	No Class: Thanksgiving		
11/30	Foreign Policy	Chapt. 17	Policy Meme
12/2	Wrap-up and Exam #2 Review		Exam #2
12/6; 12/9*			

* 10: 12/6, 3:00-5:00 PM, 54 Allen Hall; 12/9, 3:00-5:00 PM, 221 Tureaud Hall