

PLSC-1000
THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS
SPRING 2015

This course is a survey of the American system of government. It has two major objectives. First, it introduces students to basic concepts in political science such as “collective action problems” and demonstrates how governments address these issues. Second, it introduces students to major theoretical arguments supporting American democracy and how these ideas are put into practice in the institutions of government. Students will examine the design of the Constitution, the three branches of American government and how elections, political parties, the news media and other features of our democracy link the government and the people.

More broadly, the course will encourage students to think critically about our system of government, including questions such as: How well does it represent the preferences of the people? What kind of balance does it maintain between majority and minority rights? Do interest groups have too much power? And, why have our politics grown so polarized?

Professor: Peter Hanson
Peter.Hanson@du.edu

Office Hours: 3 – 5 pm, Tuesday and Friday, Sturm 471

Class Meetings: 2 pm – 3:50 pm, Monday and Wednesday, Margery Reed 106

OVERVIEW

Expectations: Class sessions will meet for approximately 110 minutes twice a week. You are expected to attend all classes. All course assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade.

Assessments

Participation	15%
Homework / Quizzes	15%
Paper (5-7 pages)	20%
Midterm	25%
Final Exam	25%

Participation includes attending class, engaging in small group discussions, and speaking up in class. Class discussions should be respectful and thoughtful. Disrespectful conduct toward other students will not be tolerated.

Multitasking (texting, Facebook, etc.) in class is a distraction to you and other students. It is not acceptable classroom behavior and is grounds for reducing your participation grade.

Extra Credit

The midterm and the final exam will each have an extra credit question. The question for the midterm will be based upon the documentary *Street Fight* and the question for the final will be based upon the documentary *The War Room*. Both documentaries can be viewed on the DU CourseMedia website. We will not take class time to watch these excellent films. You must do this independently if you wish to answer the extra credit questions. In addition, you may earn an additional 2% toward your class grade via extra credit opportunities I will offer during the quarter.

Major Due Dates

April 1	Quiz
April 17	Homework 1
April 24	Homework 2
April 29	Midterm Exam
May 15	Paper
June 1	Final Exam

Required Materials

There are two required books for the course:

The Logic of American Politics, 6th Edition, by Kernell, Jacobson and Kousser

Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America by Fiorina, Abrams and Pope

Both books can be found at the campus bookstore in the Driscoll Center and online from major booksellers.

Website

Additional course materials, including readings, podcasts and videos, will be posted on the Canvas website, which can be found at:

<https://canvas.du.edu/>

Select videos for class are also available on DU's CourseMedia website, which can be found at:

<https://coursemedia.du.edu/>

Academic Honesty

You are required to submit your own work for the course, and to ensure that it is original and properly cited. Students who are found to have plagiarized coursework will receive a failing grade for the course. It is also a violation of the DU honor code

to submit work for class that you have already submitted to another class. For additional information, please refer to DU's policies on student conduct at: <http://www.du.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode.html>

Students with Disabilities

Appropriate accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Please visit DU's website on its Disabilities Service Program for additional information. <http://www.du.edu/studentlife/disability/dsp/>

Grading Scale

DU Letter Grades (account: University of Denver)

Name:	Range:	
A	100%	to 94%
A-	< 94%	to 90%
B+	< 90%	to 87%
B	< 87%	to 84%
B-	< 84%	to 80%
C+	< 80%	to 77%
C	< 77%	to 74%
C-	< 74%	to 70%
D+	< 70%	to 67%
D	< 67%	to 64%
D-	< 64%	to 60%
F	< 60%	to 0%

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Foundations

March 23: Introduction

March 25: Theoretical Foundations

Chapter 1, KJK

Second Treatise of Government, John Locke (Canvas)

Excerpt from *The Dark Knight*. Available on DU CourseMedia. Will screen in class.

Week 2: Constitutional Design and the People

March 30: Constitutional Design

Chapter 2, KJK

Federalist 51 (Canvas)

The Anti-Federalist, No. 1 (Canvas)

Recommended: *The American Revolution: A History*, Gordon Wood (Canvas)

April 1: What Do People Know About Politics?

“The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?”
by Lupia and McCubbins (Canvas)

Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America, Fiorina, Abrams and Pope,
Chapters 1-4

“Group of Friends Engage in Passionate, Incoherent Discussion About
Current Events,” *The Onion* (Canvas)

Week 3: Organizing the People

April 6: Political Parties

Chapter 12, KJK

Excerpts from *The Politics of Women’s Rights* by Christina Wolbrecht
(Canvas)

“Our political parties are networked, not fragmented,” by Seth Masket
(Canvas)

April 8: No class

“Chicago 1968.” PBS *American Experience*. Watch full documentary on DU
CourseMedia.

Week 4: Interest Groups and the Media

April 13: Interest Groups

Chapter 13, KJK

Federalist 10 (Canvas)

“Targeting Success: The Enduring Power of the NRA,” Kelly Patterson and Matthew Singer (Canvas)

Guest Speaker: Lee Drutman

April 15: News Media and Campaign Ads

Chapter 14, KJK

“The Hyped Panic Over ‘War of the Worlds’” by Michael Socolow (Canvas)

“Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science,” by John Zaller (Canvas)

Week 5: Campaigns

April 20: Campaigns Overview

Chapter 11, KJK

“The Hand You’re Dealt.” Excerpt from *The Gamble* by John Sides and Lynn Vavreck. (Canvas)

Excerpt from *Housequake*, “Heath Shuler.” Will screen in class. Available on DU CourseMedia.

April 22: Money in Politics

“The Nine Lives of Buckley v. Valeo,” Richard Hasen (Canvas)

“Spending by independent groups had little election impact, analysis finds,” *Washington Post* (Canvas)

“Does Money Really Buy Elections?” *Freakonomics Radio* Podcast. Available on Canvas, listen on own.

“The Lobbyist’s Playbook.” *60 Minutes* segment. Available on Canvas. Will screen in class.

Week 6: Midterm

April 27: Federalism and Midterm Review

Chapter 3, KJK

“Little Rock Central High.” Excerpt from *Eyes on the Prize*. Available on DU CourseMedia. Watch on own.

“Medical Pot: Will Colorado’s ‘green rush’ last?” *60 Minutes* video segment. Available on Canvas. Will screen in class.

April 29: Midterm Exam

Week 7: Congress

May 4: Overview of Congress

Constitution, Article 1

Chapter 6, KJK

Congress: The Electoral Connection by David Mayhew (Canvas)

May 6: Partisan Polarization

“Spoiling the Sausages? How a Polarized Congress Deliberates and Legislates,” Barbara Sinclair (Canvas)

“Mitigating Extreme Partisanship in an Era of Networked Parties: An Examination of Various Reform Strategies,” Seth Masket (Canvas)

Too Weak to Govern excerpts, Peter Hanson, (Canvas)

Week 8: Executive Branch

May 11: President

Constitution, Article II

Chapter 7, KJK

“Presidential Power,” Richard Neustadt (Canvas)

“Obama Going Public.” NPR Weekend Edition podcast. Available on Canvas, listen on own.

Excerpt from *Lincoln*. Available on DU CourseMedia. Will screen in class.

May 13: Bureaucracy

Chapter 8, KJK

“Climate Expert Says NASA Tried to Silence Him,” *New York Times* (Canvas)

Week 9: Courts

May 18: Courts Overview

Constitution, Article III and Amendments 1-10

Chapter 9, KJK

Making Our Democracy Work by Stephen Breyer, chapters 1-3 and 5 (Canvas)

May 20: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Chapter 5, KJK

“FBI’s search for ‘Mo,’ suspect in bomb threats, highlights use of malware for surveillance,” *Washington Post*

On Liberty, John Stuart Mill (Canvas)

Snyder v. Phelps (2011) (Canvas)

Week 10: Review

May 25: No class (Memorial Day)

May 27: Review for Final Exam

Final Exam: June 1st