



American Politics

PS 0200

3 Credits

Description: This is an introductory course in American politics. The course is suitable for beginning political science students or students who wish to complete the course as part of a “general education” requirement. The purpose of the course is to teach students both about the American political system and about broad concepts social scientists use to study politics.

Prerequisite: Basic algebra is a suggested prerequisite for this course.

Grading: The grade in this course is based on examinations and an optional “debate the issues” assignment. In the course’s optional “debate the issues” section, students would be asked to construct arguments surrounding a controversial issue of the day. Students should work in groups to present these arguments both in a short paper and in a speech. Each group, then, would produce a series of papers and speeches. This optional section may come at the end of the term, as a “capstone” that uses material learned throughout the semester.

Textbook: are *The Logic of American Politics* by Kernell, Jacobson, and Kousser or *The American Political System* by Kollman. CHS Teachers also are required to employ a primer provided by the University’s Faculty Liaison.

The following is a list of topics that should be included in the course. Although the topics are listed here in a somewhat intuitive order, they may be covered in any order that works best for the students. The “broader concepts” ought to be discussed throughout the course, as they are relevant to the specific topics.

1. Historical Context

- Philosophical influences on the founding
- The Continental Congress
- Declaration of Independence
- Institutional design and development

2. The Constitution

- Institutional design
- Separation of powers
- The Great Compromise
- The 3/5 Compromise
- The Bill of Rights
- Ratification
- The Federalist Papers
- Federalism and its evolution

3. Civil rights

- The Missouri Compromise
- The Civil War
- Dred Scott
- Reconstruction and Jim Crow
- Brown v. Board (and its relationship to Plessy)
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Women’s suffrage
- The Women’s movement
- Hispanic rights
- Gay rights
- Rights of the Disabled



4. Civil Liberties

- Relationship to majority rule
- The first ten amendments, esp. the first
- “Incorporation” and the 14th Amendment
- Criminal rights
- Privacy rights

5. Congress

- Powers of Congress
- Elections
- Representation
- Legislative Organization
- Parties and Committees
- Legislative process

6. The Presidency

- Historical context of the presidency
- The Modern Presidency
- The powers of the president
- The “bully pulpit”
- The power of the veto
- The federal bureaucracy
- Bureaucratic autonomy
- Congressional control
- Presidential control

7. The Judiciary

- McCullough v. Maryland
- Dred Scott
- The Supreme Court
- The Federal Courts
- Judicial decision-making
- Separation of powers

8. Public opinion

- Polling practices
- Attitudes/Ideologies
- Partisanship
- Party development
- Information acquisition
- Framing effects
- Demographic divisions in public opinion

9. Voting and Elections

- Turnout
- Electoral laws
- Voters’ decision-making
- Interest groups
- Campaign finance

10. Broad concepts/problems

- Collective action problems
- Coordination problems
- Delegation and principal-agent problems
- Institutional “stickiness”

Optional “debate the issues” topics

- How much influence should public employees unions have?
- How much oversight should the federal government have over the financial industry?
- Should the government step in to decrease income inequality?
- Is business-style competition a good model for improving schools?
- Does the federal government take too much power from the states?
- How will the Tea Party affect the American political landscape?
- Is the United States in a global clean energy race?
- Is “Obamacare” a good law?
- Is WikiLeaks a threat to national security?
- Should the US move to a carbon tax to protect against global climate change?
- Should the United States negotiate with the Taliban?
- Should the US amend the Constitution in the wake of the Citizens United decision?



Academic Integrity: All College in High School teachers, students, and their parents/guardians are required to review and be familiar with the University of Pittsburgh's Academic Integrity Policy located online at www.as.pitt.edu/fac/policies/academic-integrity.

Grades: Grade criteria in the high school course may differ slightly from University of Pittsburgh standards. A CHS student could receive two course grades: one for high school and one for the University transcript. In most cases the grades are the same. These grading standards are explained at the beginning of each course.

Transfer Credit: University of Pittsburgh grades earned in CHS courses appear on an official University of Pittsburgh transcript, and the course credits are likely to be eligible for transfer to other colleges and universities. Students are encouraged to contact potential colleges and universities in advance to ensure their CHS credits would be accepted. If students decide to attend any University of Pittsburgh campuses, the University of Pittsburgh grade earned in the course will count toward the student grade point average at the University. At the University of Pittsburgh, the CHS course supersedes any equivalent AP credit.

Drops and Withdrawals: Students should monitor progress in a course. CHS teacher can obtain a Course Drop/Withdrawal Request form from the CHS office or Aspire. The form must be completed by the student, teacher and parent/guardian and returned to teacher by deadlines listed. Dropping and withdrawing from the CHS course has no effect on enrollment in the high school credits for the course.