

# PSCI 110: American Government

Fall 2018  
Drexel University

Thursday through Tuesday  
Online

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**Appointments:** <https://jacksantucci.acuityscheduling.com>

## 1 Overview & goals

What is the American political system? What are its main parts? How is it different from other democratic systems? Are these differences good or bad? This course gives a unified overview of the American politics field, focusing on what it takes to *change policy*. When this course is over, you will:

- Have a more sophisticated grasp of American political institutions and processes,
- Be able to tell what is at stake in media coverage of American politics,
- Know about some useful models for understanding politics.

## 2 Things to buy

- Kollman, Ken. 2013. *The American Political System, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. W. W. Norton & Company. **(KK)**. NOTE: The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition is fine but more expensive.
- Taylor, Steven L., Matthew S. Shugart, Arend Lijphart, and Bernard Grofman. 2014. *A Different Democracy: American Government in a Thirty-One-Country Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press. **(TSLG)**.

## 3 Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following components. See below for an explanation of each.

1. Participation (10%).
2. Quizzes (30%).
3. Midterm exam (30%).
4. Final exam (30%).

### **3.1 Participation**

You need to come to class every day it meets. In an online setting, this means completing both of the week's lessons by 11:59 PM on Tuesday of the following week. Participation also means regular, thoughtful, and on-topic additions to any course discussion.

### **3.2 Quizzes**

Readings must be done before the lectures under which they are listed. Expect to take a quiz before and after each online session. A quiz given before class tests reading comprehension. After-class quizzes reinforce important ideas. Whether I give either or both will depend on the difficulty of the day's reading and how it relates to what comes next.

### **3.3 Midterm exam**

This will ask you define key concepts and say why they help us understand some part of the American political system. One short paragraph should be sufficient to answer each question. You may use your notes and books, but don't waste time rereading them. The exam is time-limited.

### **3.4 Final exam**

The final exam will be an essay, which you will write in response to some prompt. How do you get an "A" on this? Have a thesis statement, support it with logic and/or evidence, structure your paragraphs so that they have topic sentences, organize your paragraphs so that one follows from the next, and do your best to use good grammar. Make it easy for a busy reader to follow your argument. Five to seven paragraphs should suffice. You may use your notes and books, but don't waste time rereading them. The exam is time-limited.

## **4 Other policies**

You agree to:

1. Check Drexel email daily through the final-exam date.
2. Attend class and meet course deadlines *except in documented cases of bereavement, severe illness, or medical emergency*. You must provide a doctor's note or funeral announcement if you cannot meet a deadline and/or attend a class meeting.
3. Use Internet search or a dictionary to look up words you do not understand.
4. Abide by all other Drexel policies, found at the following websites. Note: I reserve the right to use plagiarism-detection software.
  - Academic integrity: <https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/>
  - Disability accommodation: <https://drexel.edu/oed/disabilityResources/students/Accommodations/>

- Course withdrawal: <https://drexel.edu/provost/policies/course-withdrawal/>

I agree to:

1. Abide by any grading guidelines in this syllabus and related instructions for assignments. Grading is on the 0-100 scale: 93 and up (A), 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-87 (B), 80-82 (B-), and so on, down to 50 (F).
2. Answer student e-mail within 48 business hours. Business hours are 9 AM to 5:30 PM, Monday through Friday, non-holiday.
3. Except for the required books, post links to readings on Blackboard, if not the readings themselves.
4. Grade written work within 10 business days of its submission.
5. Notify you of changes to this syllabus at least one week in advance of affected due dates.
6. Give office hours on a by-appointment basis. My commuting schedule makes it hard to be present in my office. (I teach four classes, one of them in DC.) At my “appointments” link, however, I have blocked off time for Skype calls and in-person meetings.

## **5 Schedule of readings & classes**

### **5.1 Two simple models of democratic politics**

**Class 1** This syllabus. “Preface” and “Introduction” in TSLG.

**Class 2** “Introduction” in KK.

### **5.2 The Constitution and federalism**

**Class 3** “Political Engineering & the US Constitution” in TSLG. “The Constitution” in KK.

**Class 4** “Constitutions” in TSLG.

**Class 5** “Federalism” in KK. “Federalism & Division of Power” in TSLG.

### **5.3 Political parties and interest groups**

**Class 6** “Interest Groups & Social Movements” in KK.

**Class 7** “Political Parties” in KK.

**Class 8** “Elections & Electoral Systems” in TSLG.

### **5.4 Midterm**

**Class 9** Exam in class.

## **5.5 How American national institutions work in practice**

**Class 10** “Congress” in KK. “Legislative Power” in TSLG.

**Class 11** “The Presidency” in KK. “Executive Power” in TSLG.

**Class 12** “The Bureaucracy” in KK.

**Class 13** “The Judiciary” in KK. “Judicial Power” in TSLG.

## **5.6 The role of regular people**

**Class 14** “Political Participation” in KK.

**Class 15** “Public Opinion” in KK.

**Class 16** “Mass Media and the Press” in KK.

**Class 17** “Elections & Campaigns” in KK. “Political Parties, Election Campaigns, & Interest Groups” in TSLG.

## **5.7 Comparing the United States to other democracies**

**Class 18** APSA Committee on Parties. 1950. “Summary of Conclusions and Proposals.”<sup>1</sup>

**Class 19** “Comparative Conclusions” in TSLG.

## **5.8 Recap**

**Class 20**

- Lecture covering key concepts, models, and examples. Bring questions. This is review for the final exam.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.jstor.org/stable/1950998>