

POSC 100: CONTEMPORARY U.S. POLITICS

FALL 2015

Dr. Jack D. Collens

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Course Time: 8:00am – 9:00am
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday
314 Siena Hall

Office Hours: 2:30pm –4:30pm
M, W, & Th
321C Siena Hall

The study of government is the study of our daily lives. Politics pervades everything we do, see, hear, and even taste and touch. This course is designed to help students recognize the importance not only of the outcomes of policy makers' decisions, but also the processes that help to create them. By the end of this course, students should be informed consumers of political information. In particular, this class will focus on the underlying logic of American constitutional design, the roles and powers of our political institutions, and the various ways in which voters and citizens connect to their government. This course will also serve as an introduction to political science as a discipline, as students will be exposed to relevant political science research and will be expected to discuss this research in detail. Through class discussion, debate, and writing assignments, students will develop important critical thinking, written communication, and oral communication skills. The primary goal of the course is to help students understand the reality of contemporary politics in the United States so that they may be better equipped to play a role in the democratic process.

Texts

The text below is **required** and can be found in the Siena College bookstore or online. Note that it is also available for rental via Amazon, as it is often a cheaper option than purchasing the book. Other required readings can be found on the course Blackboard page or via links in the syllabus.

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2015. *The Logic of American Politics, Seventh Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. (ISBN: 978-1-4833-1984-1)

Learning Goals

This course addresses the following college, school, and departmental learning goals:

Siena College Learning Goals

1. INFORMED REASONING: Students will think critically and creatively to make reasoned and informed judgments. Through engagement with contemporary and enduring questions of human concern, students will solve problems in ways that reflect the integration of knowledge across general and specialized studies, and they will demonstrate competence in information literacy and independent research.
2. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: Students will read texts with comprehension and critical involvement, write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences, speak knowledgeably, and listen with discernment and empathy.
4. REGARD FOR HUMAN SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY: Students will affirm the unity of the human family, uphold the dignity of individuals, and delight in diversity. They will demonstrate intercultural knowledge and respect.

School of Liberal Arts Learning Goals

1. Apply evaluative thinking skills to investigate the complexities of the human past and its connections to artistic, ethical, sociopolitical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of contemporary life.
3. Utilize effective oral, written, and artistic communication relevant to academic disciplines.
7. Develop a perspective that recognizes diversity within and among cultures.

Major/Program Learning Goals

The Political Science program aims to provide students with:

- A foundation for future careers;
- A solid theoretical, empirical, and methodological foundation for future graduate study;
- A knowledge and awareness, as citizens, of the responsibility that membership within a democratic society entails;
- A sensitivity to the cultural and political diversity within the United States and the world community.

Learning Outcomes

To accomplish these goals, students in this class will:

- Learn about our Constitution and how political institutions and actors interact to change the course of public policy
- Hear and contribute a diversity of opinions in a classroom environment which mimics the pluralistic nature of our society
- Improve their critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills through carefully designed course discussions, debates, and writing assignments
- Learn to use the **Chicago style** of citation and reference management (author-date style)
- Become better informed consumers of political information

Student Responsibilities & Assessment

Attendance

Reading is necessary for a successful college experience, but it is far from sufficient. Class attendance is more than mere reinforcement of material you may have read in the assigned readings. As such, students must attend class regularly, take comprehensive notes, ask for clarification when necessary, and participate in discussion. I will draw test questions from the texts, lectures, and discussion material, so you must pay attention. Attendance is mandatory. I will forgive up to two unexcused absences per student. **For each unexcused absence beyond the permitted two, students will lose two full grade points from their final course grade** (*i.e.*, a 91 becomes an 89 if the student has missed three classes without a valid excuse).

Active & Informed Participation

Attendance is not sufficient to earn a satisfactory participation grade. This course requires *active* and *informed* participation. As such, students are expected to speak up in class and contribute to discussions and debates with relevant points and questions. Note that this approach emphasizes quality of participation over quantity. I will monitor your contributions each week and provide you with a current participation grade at the midpoint of the semester, so you may adjust your participation accordingly. Participation is worth 15 percent of the final course grade and will assess students' critical thinking and oral communication skills.

Exams

You will receive three exams—two midterms and a *non-cumulative* final. These exams will consist of short answer questions and an essay prompt. I shall draw exam questions from lectures, discussions, and the required texts. Be punctual on test days, as you will have no extended time. Makeup exams will differ significantly from the original exam and will only be granted with a valid, college-recognized excuse.

Reaction Papers

Fifteen percent of your final grade will come from two short reaction papers, due on **November 2** and **November 30**. Specific guidelines for these assignments will be provided in the first few weeks of class. These papers will assess students' critical thinking and writing skills, as well as their abilities to use the Chicago style of citation and reference management. Papers will be due both as hard copies and via Turnitin through Blackboard. The paper topics will be:

1. **Electoral Reform Paper (Due November 2):** For this paper, students will write 4–5 pages on one of the following electoral reform proposals: (1) Reducing the voting age to 15; (2) National voter identification requirements; (3) Automatic voter registration; (4) National vote by mail. Students must find two relevant articles on the topic from a reputable news site (see me if you are unsure whether your source is reputable), then spend their essay *briefly* summarizing the proposal, evaluating arguments for and against the reform, and then choosing a side (in favor of or opposing the reform).
2. **Comparative Candidate Profile (Due November 30):** For this paper, students will write 4–5 pages on two candidates for the 2016 presidential election. Both candidates must be from the same party. Students will compare the candidates' backgrounds and experience, their appeal to key subgroups within the party, their fundraising record to date, their relative stances in the polls, etc. Finally, students will evaluate both candidates' chances of both winning the party's nomination and winning the general election.

Quizzes

Reading quizzes will constitute 10 percent of students' final grades and will be administered without advance warning. There will be at least 5 quizzes and at most 10 throughout the semester. The number of quizzes administered will be determined by the relative strength of students' preparation. That is, I will require quizzes on days students seem unprepared. If, after a few minutes of discussion, it becomes obvious that students have not read or prepared for class, I will ask students to put away all materials and take a three-question quiz. At the end of the semester, I will drop the lowest quiz grade.

Grading

A = 93–100; 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 ≤ 59.

Item	Percentage
Exam I	20 percent
Exam II	20 percent
Exam III	20 percent
Reading Quizzes	10 percent
Paper 1	7.5 percent
Paper 2	7.5 percent
Participation	15 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

A Note on Grades

Students requesting a grade change on individual assignments must do the following *within a week of receiving the graded material*:

1. Wait *at least 24 hours* after receiving the graded assignment.
2. Submit a typed request for grade change, including the following:
 - (a) Name
 - (b) Assignment title
 - (c) Grade received
 - (d) Grade requested
 - (e) *Detailed* justification for requested change, including citation of relevant course material
3. Bring a *hard copy* of the request to class or my office, attached to the original graded assignment.

I will give all requests for grade change a thorough review. Note, however, that I will review the entirety of the graded assignment, not just the components requested. This means that you may receive a grade increase, but you may also receive a lower grade.

If you are concerned about your grade in the course, it is your responsibility to do everything in your power to improve your own grade. I am available to help you in several ways —by helping you improve your studying tactics, by helping you strategize for papers and other assignments, by helping you to understand particularly difficult material, etc.—but you must come to office hours (or make an appointment) to receive that help! My door is always open (figuratively speaking—if it is closed, feel free to knock).

There will also be a small handful of extra credit opportunities throughout the semester. These are your chance to improve your grade. You will receive no additional opportunities for extra credit.

Barring an error in calculation on my part, I will not change final grades. I am unable and unwilling to help students after all graded components of the course are completed. Students who are struggling in the class must contact me well in advance of the semester's end to provide any realistic opportunity to affect their final grade.

Availability

The best way to contact me is via email. Please include the course number and time in your subject line (“POSC 100 – 8am”). If your question requires more than a few sentences to ask, please feel free to visit my office hours. If you cannot meet during office hours, feel free to email me to schedule another time. Note, however, that failure to appear during any meetings scheduled outside of my regular office hours will count against your participation grade.

Disabilities & Illnesses

Students with disabilities of any kind are strongly encouraged to notify me and the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at the beginning of the semester, so the appropriate accommodations can be made. Please note that I am willing to work with students who contract illnesses, but it is the student's responsibility to contact me as soon as they are aware of the illness to plan their coursework for the duration of the illness. I can help you during and immediately after any illnesses, but I cannot help you if you wait until the end of the semester to make up any missed work.

Academic Honesty

All Siena College policies relating to academic honesty will be upheld in this course. An outline of the college's Academic Integrity Policy is available at <https://www2.siena.edu/pages/2667.asp>. I require all papers to be submitted both as hard copies and electronically via Turnitin, which will detect *any* use of others' words. Please note that I have a “zero tolerance” policy towards cheating and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and cheating.

Assistance

Students requiring assistance with their writing may see me in my office or contact the Siena College [Writing Center](#). As you will not be allowed to rewrite any assignments, I suggest you take advantage of the resources available to help you with your writing before turning in any written assignments.

Diversity Awareness

Students will treat each other with respect and dignity in my classroom. Failure to do so will be severely punished. Where appropriate, students should be open to other perspectives and experiences. I encourage students to inform me of their preferred gender pronouns as early as possible.

Laptop Policy

The current generation of college students grew up in the connected age; as such, computers are as much a part of your learning experience as textbooks and pens. However, the [most current research](#) on laptop and tablet use in classrooms suggests that significant majorities of students who use laptops in class spend more than 10 minutes in class on social networking sites and non-course related sites, that these types of activities can distract those around you, and that taking notes by hand is a far more effective strategy than using a laptop. As such, I require that any students who choose to use laptops must sit in the back half of the classroom. Students taking notes by hand may sit in the front half of the classroom, free from the distractions of their neighbors' favorite YouTube clips and cat photos.

A final word on the use of laptops: Most faculty members recognize the tension between wanting to allow laptops (which will help students develop the skills they will need to incorporate technology in their future careers) and wanting to ensure adequate delivery of course material. My policy is somewhat of a compromise. Note, however, that I retain the right to alter this policy and ban laptops from my classroom (exceptions would apply to those with relevant disabilities). My goal in this class is to ensure that you become better-informed consumers of political information and are able to participate in the political process. I will work with you to ensure that you are able to use your laptops effectively to that end and will, from time to time, encourage the use of laptops or even smart phones to retrieve relevant material in class, but students should be careful not to take this as a *carte blanche* to distract themselves and others.

Class Schedule[†]

Date	Topics	Reading(s)	Due
09.09.2015	Course Introduction	Syllabus	
09.11.2015	Problems of Collective Action	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 1	
09.14.2015 09.16.2015 09.18.2015	Founding Founding Founding	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 38–53 <i>Common Sense</i> , I–II <i>Common Sense</i> , III–IV	
09.21.2015 09.23.2015 09.25.2015	Constitution Constitution/Federalism Constitution	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 53–79 <i>Federalists</i> 10 & 51	
09.28.2015 09.30.2015 10.02.2015 10.05.2015 10.07.2015	Voting Voting Elections Elections: Money Elections: Deciding to Run	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 442–458 <i>New York Times Room for Debate</i> <i>Logic</i> , pp. 458–479 [1] <i>Colbert Report</i> videos [2] Victor (2015) [1] Lawless & Fox (2013) [2] Kanthak & Woon (2015)	
10.09.2015 10.12.2015	Exam 1 Review *****EXAM 1*****		
10.14.2015 10.16.2015	<i>West Wing</i> HOLIDAY—NO CLASSES		
10.19.2015 10.21.2015 10.23.2015 10.26.2015	Congress Congress Congress: Leadership Crisis 2015 Congress: Redistricting	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 214–234 <i>Logic</i> , pp. 234–255 [1] Lee (2015) [2] Prokop (2015) [1] McCarty (2012) [2] Carson, et al. (2014)	
10.28.2015 10.30.2015 11.02.2015 11.04.2015	Presidency Presidency Presidency: Nomination Campaigns Presidency: The Electoral College	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 7 <i>Campaigns & Elections</i> , pp. 240–252 Edwards & Gregg (2014)	Paper 1

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Date	Topic	Reading(s)	Due
11.06.2015 11.09.2015 11.11.2015	Judiciary Judiciary Judiciary: Electing Judges	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 371–396 <i>Logic</i> , pp. 358–371 [1] Yanklowitz (2014) [2] Bonneau (2011)	
11.13.2015	*****EXAM 2*****		
11.16.2015 11.18.2015 11.20.2015 11.23.2015	Civil Liberties Civil Liberties Civil Liberties Civil Liberties: Same-Sex Marriage	<i>Logic</i> , pp. 172–190 <i>Logic</i> , pp. 190–212 [1] Howe (2015) [2] Lerner (2015)	
11.25.2015 11.27.2015	THANKSGIVING BREAK THANKSGIVING BREAK		
11.30.2015 12.02.2015 12.04.2015 12.07.2015	Civil Liberties: Phone Records Parties & Interest Groups Parties & Interest Groups Parties & Interest Groups	<i>Intelligence² U.S. Debate</i> <i>Logic</i> , pp. 482–492 <i>Logic</i> , pp. 514–525 <i>Logic</i> , Ch. 13	Paper 2
12.09.2015 12.11.2015	Media & Polarization Media & Polarization	<i>Logic</i> , Ch. 10 [1] Levendusky (2014) [2] Arceneaux (2014)	
12.14.2015	*****EXAM 3*****		

[†]Note that I reserve the right to alter the course's schedule and all deadlines as I see fit.