

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY AT POMONA  
**COLLEGE OF LETTERS, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**  
**EXPANDED COURSE OUTLINE**

Subject Area/Course #	PLS 420
Course Title:	American Political Institutions & Behavior
Units:	4
CS #:	C-5 (Lectures)
Component:	Lecture, discussion
Grading basis:	Graded
Preparation date:	February 4, 2015
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**I. Catalogue description**

**PLS 420– American Political Institutions & Behavior**

The study and impact of government institutions and political behavior on American society; the evolution and understanding of the behavior of United States citizens in response to American institutions and ideals in the Constitution since the Founding; the importance of linkage institutions that communicate citizen opinions to government and its effect on sociological, economic and political problems in the US; and particular focus on the California Constitution, institutions, citizens and problems. 4 units. Lecture and discussion. Area D-4 GE.

**II. Required background or experience**

Completion of GE areas A1, A2, A3 and D1, D2, D3.

**III. Expected outcomes**

*Section A:*

Upon the completion of this course, the students will be able to:

1. Critically assess the distinctions between political institutions and political behavior and the importance of these distinctions in understanding the creation and solution of social, political and economic problems in the US
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the political philosophies of the United States and California Constitutions to assess the evolution of the relationship between federal and state governments and contemporary social, economic, and political problems these philosophies have created
3. Expand in greater depth the ideas covered in lower division courses which may include economics, history, ethnic and women's studies, and sociology in

order to gain a deeper knowledge and evaluate contemporary political, social, and economic problems the US currently faces

4. Demonstrate an understanding of how citizens form and articulate opinions about government institutions and participate in the political process through voting and other means
5. Appreciate and evaluate the cross-cultural distribution of patterns of social behavior amongst major social groups in America since the Founding to explain the significance of these differences to the development and continuity of the American political experience, especially in regard to social and cultural diversity
6. Apply recent scholarship and literature, especially with respect to multiple methodological designs and approaches across different disciplines, to address critical and contemporary problems and social issues in American government
7. Evaluate the importance of civic engagement for local government and broader institutional processes, but also in especially in regard to representation and economic, political, and social inequality

GE Student Learning Outcomes covered by this class:

Ia. Write effectively for various audiences

- Students will cover this outcome through the written demonstration of their understanding in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> learning outcomes.

Ib. Speak effectively for various audiences

- Students will cover this by preparing and given an oral presentation to demonstrate their understanding of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> learning outcomes.

1c. Find, evaluate, use and share information effectively and ethically.

- Students will be expected to use library resources, including digital and online sources, to research both the written and oral presentation. These two class assignments will cover each of the learning outcomes.

1d. Construct arguments based on sound evidence and reasoning to support an opinion or conclusion

- Students will construct arguments about political, social and economic inequality of the United States, demonstrating their ability to development arguments about the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> learning outcomes.

2d. Integrate concepts, examples, and theories from more than one discipline to identify problems, construct original ideas, and draw conclusions.

- Course lectures will encourage students to consider contemporary problems and inequality created by political institutions. Exams, the written assignment, and oral presentation will assess the students' ability to construct ideas and draw conclusions about these problems.

3a. Analyze the historical development of diverse cultures and the role they play in shaping core institutions and practices of individuals and societies.

- Students will learn about the historical development of factions and groups in American society, but analyze these developments in the written assignment and oral presentation.

3b. Analyze principles, methods, value systems, and ethics of social issues confronting local and global communities.

- In the written assignment, students will be asked to analyze how political ideologies affect contemporary social, economic and political problems in the United States by assessing these problems using various methodologies, requiring students to demonstrate mastery of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> learning outcomes.

*Section B:*

This course covers *all* three sub-areas of Area D and is strongly interdisciplinary:

- **Area D1, US History, Constitution, and American Ideals:** A fundamental component of the course requires students to cover the US and CA Constitutions in the first few weeks of the course to help them understand democracy, but also come to appreciate the contemporary problems created by our governmental institutions and act as constructive and responsible citizens in light of those problems.
- **Area D2, History, Economics, Political Science:** This course is a political science course and is highly influenced by scholars and academics in our discipline. As this course examines US government and citizen behavior beginning with the Founding, the historical development of the country is well covered in each week of the course. American Political Development, a subfield in political science with strong influences from history, is covered. Suggested readings from Skowronek allow students to appreciate the work done by APD scholars and historians. In addition, I have suggested primary sources from the Framers of the Constitution, but from Alexis de Tocqueville and John Locke. A large number of primary sources from political leaders, activists and philosophers may be included, but the full list is not given in the ECO. Finally, much of the work in political behavior is strongly influenced by economists. The ECO has covered this by suggesting readings by Downs and Olson, but most of the work on voting behavior, political parties, public opinion, elections and political participation (weekly topics in the course) has strong ties to economic theorists.
- **Area D3, Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnic and Gender Studies:** The course encourages students to consider contemporary political, social and economic problems created by American institutions and political behavior. Political behavior shares strong similarities to sociology. In fact, most sociology departments offer courses on political sociology that borrow heavily from political scientists who do work in this area. Since American government is plagued with so many unique problems, each week of the course could be constructed to challenge students to think about a number of contemporary social problems in each topic covered. I have included suggested readings from Omi and Winant, Putnam, and Van Vechten, work that is often used in sociology courses. Also, a specific week of the course covers Race/Ethnic

Politics and Gender and Politics. A few of the readings cite work from these disciplines.

The purpose of the course is to have students develop an understanding of the issues and problems created by government, but as detailed in the explanation above, from a variety of different disciplines and methodological perspectives. To this end, the course promotes higher-order cognitive skills that require students to cull the expertise they develop in multiple lower-division courses in the social sciences. By requiring students to think about political institutions, behavior and contemporary problems in class discussions, written and oral assignments, this course encourages students to think critically about US government institutions, but also encourages students to problem solve and reason through the multiple issues that American citizens face today.

#### IV. Instructional Materials

A wide variety of resources may be available to the instructor. Given the dynamic nature of American political institutions and behavior, instructors have a number of different opportunities available to them in selecting texts for the course. Instructors could choose one or two of the primary texts as an introductory guide to discussing American political institutions *and* political behavior. However, instructors could also choose to compile a reader from some of the most seminal texts in the field. Textbooks to choose from include but are not limited to:

##### *Primary Texts*

Aldrich, John. *Why Parties? Origins and Transformation of Party Politics in America*.

Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1995.

Baum, Lawrence. *American Courts: Process and Policy*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2012.

Campbell, Angus, Phillip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes. *The American Voter*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

De Tocquville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York, NY: Modern Library, 1981[1835]. (History, Philosophy/Primary source)

Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1957. (Economics)

Jacobson, Gary. *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Longman Press, 2009.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. London, UK: Awnsham Churchill, 1869. (Philosophy/Primary source)

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2012. (Ethnic studies, sociology and history)

Smith, Kevin B. and Alan Greenblat. *Governing States and Localities*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2013.

Stimson, James A. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.

Van Vechten, Renae. *California Politics: A Primer*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2014. (Sociology and political science)

Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991.

#### *Additional Sources*

Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. *The Federalist Papers*. (Primary source)

Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. (Gender studies)

Mayhew, David R. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.

Miller, Warren and Merrill Shanks. *The New American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1965. (Economics)

Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. (Sociology)

Popkin, Samuel. *The Reasoning Voter* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Skowronek, Stephen. *Building a New American State*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 1989. (History)

To their choosing, the instructor may also choose to assign manuscripts written for academic journals across multiple disciplines: history, economics, sociology, ethnic and gender studies, philosophy, political science, etc. In addition, instructors may want to consult writings and speeches of political leaders, philosophers and activists to include as primary sources for their iteration of the course.

The instructor may also include current research articles as they appear in press. This will allow the class to focus on the most recent developments in the field.

#### **V. Minimum student materials**

Required textbooks, note-taking instruments (paper and writing implements or a computer with word-processing software), Internet access.

#### **VI. Minimum college facilities**

Classroom with a white board or a chalk board, a computer with Internet access for in-class research purposes, access to audio- and/or video- playback equipment for presenting course lectures.

#### **VII. Course outline**

**The course is structured to cover basic topics under each week. The instructor has the opportunity to cover a number of different contemporary problems caused by American institutions and behavior.**

- Week 1:** Constitutional Foundations and Separation of Powers
- US Constitution: Federalist Papers
  - Discussion of American institutions
  - Checks and balances: institutions
  - Examples of contemporary problems: war powers (executive-legislative), judicial enforcement (executive-judicial), court appointments (legislative-judicial)
- Week 2:** Federalism: California Politics and Government
- CA Constitution: Historical development of state of California
  - American political development: Historical context
  - Direct democracy: Laboratories of democracy
  - Examples of contemporary problems: immigration, affirmative action, same-sex marriage, legalization of marijuana
- Week 3:** Legislative Politics
- Constitutional Rules: Legislative bodies
  - Legislative efficiency
  - Budgetary legislation
  - Examples of contemporary problems: government inefficiency, underrepresentation of race, ethnicity and gender in legislatures
- Week 4:** Executive Politics
- Constitutional Rules: Heads of state
  - Decision-making
  - Leadership and success
  - Rhetoric and presidential speeches
  - Examples of contemporary problems: expansion of executive power, use of executive orders, gender and the executive, pandering and going public
- Week 5:** Judicial Politics
- Constitutional Rules: Arbiters of law
  - Classical Legal Thought
  - Sociological Jurisprudence
  - Legal Realism
  - Examples of contemporary problems: activism in courts, judicial elections
- Week 6:** Political Ideology and Public Opinion
- Discussion of American political behavior
  - Construction of political ideologies and trade-offs
  - Public opinion polling
  - Belief systems and consistency of opinions
  - Examples of contemporary problems: push polling, predictive models (Nate Silver models), political knowledge in the electorate, inconsistencies in political ideology
- Week 7:** Elections, Participation, and Media/Political Communication

- Electoral College
  - Voting Behavior Models: Sociological and psychological models
  - Economic voting theories: rational choice
  - Media: content producers and consumers
  - Examples of contemporary problems: popular vote, the digital divide, lower voter turnout, social media and politics, decline of social capital
- Week 8:** Race and Ethnic Politics, Gender and Politics
- Conceptualization of Citizenship
  - Racial and Gender Identity
  - Race and Governance; Protest Politics
  - Political ambition in regard to race/gender
  - Examples of contemporary problems: Native-American political experience, Hispanic-Latino political experience, Asian-American political experience, African-American political experience, Equal Rights Amendment
- Week 9:** Interest groups and Political Parties
- Collective action problem
  - Group politics and factions
  - Party systems in politics
  - Pivotal politics
  - Examples of contemporary problems: cultural and political polarization, Citizens United, money in politics
- Week 10:** Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
- Selective incorporation
  - Bill of Rights
  - Fourteenth Amendment
  - Examples of contemporary problems: civil rights movement, LGBT politics, tension between security and privacy

### **VIII. Instructional methods**

- Lecture
- Whole class discussion
- Small group discussions
- Group presentations based on library research

### **IX. Evaluation of outcomes**

#### **a. Student outcomes assessment**

Students' performance will be evaluated using various assessment instruments: quizzes and examinations, presentations, and written essays. Quizzes and examinations will test the students' understanding of ideas important to the foundation of American institutions and how citizens respond to these institutions. These quizzes and exam will also include written essays about the contemporary social and political problems faced by the United States. A written term paper will allow students to formulate arguments and critically analyze a substantive topic

formulated around the political development of the country’s history in reference to the methodologies and arguments presented by historians, sociologists, economists, and political scientists. The term paper topic requires students to reconcile the issues as Americans participate in American governmental institutions. Students will also be given the opportunity to use information and communication technologies to find research in support of arguments. A classroom presentation on a substantive topic that examines the social and economic inequalities created present in the context of government. This presentation exercise will help students gain skills in conducting library research as well as in presenting information in front of an audience in a convincing and professional manner.

Department Learning Outcomes

Library skills	Quant. Data analysis	Qual. Data analysis	Oral argument	Written argument	Learn from experience	American govt./PA	IR/comp	Legal/t heory
D	D	D	D	D		D		

**b. Course evaluation**

Students will complete departmental evaluation forms. Students will also provide a brief anonymous written assessment of the course aspects that were helpful to them and suggesting areas that need improvement. Throughout the quarter the instructor will also incorporate formative assessment techniques in order to detect students’ problems and modify teaching strategies accordingly.

**X. Assessment and GE Assessment**

GE Student Learning Outcomes will be met in the following manner:

- Ia. Write effectively for various audiences: Written essays, written exams and quizzes
- Ib. Speak effectively for various audiences: Students must present on the problems created by political institutions and behavior. An example of a presentation may ask students to examine social inequality present in the country, with the purpose of providing and brainstorming effective solutions to political, social and economic inequality
- 1c. Find, evaluate, use and share information effectively and ethically: Students must conduct library research for written essays and presentation. Ethical standards will be discussed and evaluated.
- 1d. Construct arguments based on sound evidence and reasoning to support an opinion or conclusion: Essay questions on exams, quizzes, term paper
- 2d. Integrate concepts, examples, and theories from more than one discipline to identify problems, construct original ideas, and draw conclusions: An example presentation may require students to address political, economic and social inequality by using arguments made in sociology, economics, history, etc. The written term paper will also allow



students to analyze arguments and synthesize ideas offered from scholars in the aforementioned disciplines

3a. Analyze the historical development of diverse cultures and the role they play in shaping core institutions and practices of individuals and societies: The presentation may require students to draw on the lessons of American institutions (Congress, Judiciary and the behavior of citizens (in reference to media, political parties, public opinion, participation) to analyze potential inequality amongst diverse cultures of the United States throughout its history

3b. Analyze principles, methods, value systems, and ethics of social issues confronting local and global communities: An example of a term paper may ask students to address the belief systems and ideologies of citizens in constructing our American institutions, cultures and communities (including local and state government)

Students will submit pre- and post- assessments to a rotating list of questions to assess the above GE outcomes. With the course evaluation, students will be asked to anonymously answer questions about the ability of the course to make connections across multiple disciplines.