

PSC 100 “Enduring Issues in Political Science” Fall 2006

TU/TH 11-12:20pm
112 Norton
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The Course:

PSC 100 is an introduction to the major issues and controversies that have arisen in the long and rich tradition of political research. As a first course in political science, the course provides an overview of the discipline and the major themes that have emerged over its development. It introduces core concepts that political researchers have used to understand the political world, including: government, the nation and the state, sovereignty, equality, social justice, conflict, power and authority, democracy and citizen participation, revolution and political change, human rights, freedom, constitutionalism and the rule of law, ideologies and political belief systems, etc. Through a survey of these research traditions, the course's goal is to acquaint students with both the diversity and the coherence of political research, and to enable students to put contemporary political issues in their appropriate historical and intellectual contexts. We develop a number of empirical examples for these discussions, primarily drawing upon the politics of advanced liberal democracies. An underlying theme will be to question whether political science is a real *science*?

A goal of the course that is closely related to the above is to introduce students to our department of political science, our faculty members and their research interests, and opportunities for further study in the department (and beyond). If you would like more information along these lines, and if you are familiar with “surfing” on the internet, you may wish to browse the Department's “home page” on the world wide web. It can be found at the following URL:

<http://wings.buffalo.edu/pol-sci/>

You will find links there to a variety of additional resource materials that reside on the “net” for students of political science. I urge you to explore these materials. Starting locally, by getting to know your own UB political science department, is always the best way! In addition, a class 'listserv' email discussion list has been set up. I will use this to communicate with you from time to time, and you can use it to pose questions or issues for general discussion among your classmates. Accordingly, you will need to be checking your email regularly in order to receive these messages.

I hope the course will stimulate, and perhaps at times even provoke, you. It is an exciting time to be studying politics and I hope that the introduction you will receive this semester will whet your appetite for more!

Required Text:

Munroe Eagles, Christopher Holoman, and Larry Johnston, *Politics: An Introduction to Democratic Government*, 2nd ed., Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004 (paperback).

Requirements/Grading:

Students are expected to be regular in their class attendance. Final grades will be assigned according to your performance on three non-cumulative examinations and a short research assignment:

- a) First exam - Tuesday, October 3rd – in class – 25%
- b) Second exam - Thursday, November 2nd – in class – 25%
- c) Third exam - Thursday, December 7th OR during final exam period – in class – 25%
- d) Quantitative Research Assignment – due October 19th - 25%

Examinations have a 'multiple choice' question format. Questions will be of varying degrees of difficulty. They will be computer-graded, and are non-cumulative (i.e., the second exam deals with material covered after the first, and the third with materials covered after the second).

Grades will be assigned on the following basis: A: 86% +; A-: 80-85%; B+: 77-79%; B: 74-76%; B-: 70-73%; C+: 67-69%; C: 64-66%; C-: 60-63%; D+: 57-59%; D: 50-56%; F: < 50%.

No “incomplete” grades will be given unless it is for a medical or other emergency.

Readings/Topics:

The following topics are arranged chronologically, but our progress through them will not be in uniform chunks of time. Regular announcements will let you know where you should be in the readings.

Historical and Definitional Background

1. *Introduction to the Political Science: A Historical and Sub-Disciplinary Overview*

After a brief definitional discussion of some central concepts, lectures will present an overview of the long history of political research, focusing on the last hundred years (when “political science” emerged as a distinct discipline of academic inquiry). Brief introductions to the various subfields of the discipline will also be given, in order that you appreciate the diversity of what political scientists “do”. We will pose the question “is political science a science?”, a question we’ll return to in the final week of the semester.

Readings:

Eagles et al., Chapters 1 & 2

Central Controversies: Ideas and Political Life

2. *Classic Debates in the History of Political Thought*

Political life has been examined in a systematic way for over 2,500 years. Over this long history, a number of core debates over the *ends* to which collective life ought to aspire, and how collective life ought to be organized so as to achieve these desirable ends. We refer to this set of activities as political philosophy. Many of the conflicts that have emerged over the long history of political study continue to have strong relevance contemporary political life. We will discuss the latter primarily by means of a discussion of various ideologies and political cultures.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapters 3, 4 & 5

Institutional Settings for Political Life

3. *Constitutional and Non-Constitutional States*

The 180+ states of the world exhibit a diversity of governmental forms. Political science seeks to describe and explain these differences, and outline their consequences for governance. A basic distinction exists between states that recognize constitutional limits on the exercise of political power and others that do not. In this section of the course we consider the defining features of constitutionalism, discuss alternatives, and identify several broad patterns in the organization of constitutional rule.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapter 6, pp. 165-181

The Emergence and Essence of Liberal Democracy

4. *Waves of Democratization and Liberal Democracy*

Democracies represent one important form of government that arise at various points in our history, and which draw upon specific pre-conditions. It is often said that we are currently experiencing the “third wave” of democratization. We consider this argument in the context of a broader consideration of political change and political development. In this section we also identify the defining processes (representation, for example) associated with the concept of liberal democracy, a specific form of constitutional government.

Readings:

Eagles et al., Chapters 6 (pp. 181-185) and 7 (all)

5. *Configuring Executive-Legislative Relations: **Parliamentary versus Presidential Regimes***

Constitutional governments can generally be classified as being either presidential or parliamentary, with the basis for this distinction being found in the relationship between executives and legislatures. This section of the course explores the key features of each form of liberal democratic governance and discusses their consequences. We will consider examples of each type of system from around the world.

Readings:

Eagles et al., Chapters 8- 9

6. *Governing Territory: Federal **versus** Unitary Systems*

States also differ in the institutions and processes by which governmental authority is partitioned *geographically* within their borders. Federal systems, such as the United States, distribute powers across geographically-defined levels of government in the constitution. Other countries with unitary systems of government, such as Great Britain, do not. We explore some of the variations across and within these types, discuss reasons for adopting one or the other, and consider some of the consequences of these differences.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapter 10

Society and Politics: Understanding the Political Process in Liberal Democracies

7. *The Sociology of Political Life: Cleavage Structures and Political Division*

Governing diverse and complex societies is an enormous challenge. Conflict and competition are crucial for the survival and smooth operation of liberal democracies. Societal demands for political action tend to follow regular lines of division which we refer to as cleavages. These 'fault lines' in society condition political life and are related to patterns of political competition.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapter 11

8. *Parties and Elections and Interest Representation in Liberal Democracies*

Conflict and competition are institutionalized and regulated in the electoral and party systems, and in the interest representation process. In this section we identify the major alternative electoral systems and consider their primary consequences. We also discuss different types of political parties, and consider some broad patterns in political participation. Also considered are the main alternative forms of interest group politics in liberal democracies.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapters 12

The (Art?) of Governing: Implementing and Adjudicating Policy

9. *Implementing Policies- Bureaucracies and Political Life*

Governmental bureaucracies are organizations that specialize in the implementation of public policy. They also, however, play an important role in shaping the content of public policy. In this section we consider the chief characteristics of these organizations, and discuss their growth in the modern era.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapter 13

10. *Administering Justice in the Liberal Democratic State*

The rule of law is among the defining features of liberal democracy, and its administration is entrusted to the judicial system. In this section we consider some of the central concepts underpinning the legal systems of liberal democracies, and discuss the relationship of the courts and other political institutions.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapter 14

11. *Governing in a Global Village*

With the progress of globalization, politics in countries all over the world are becoming more permeable to forces that stem from outside their territorial boundaries. This section looks at the performance and future of the welfare state in the context of global economic and political pressures. Some of the most significant international actors are identified, and their contribution to the international system discussed.

Reading:

Eagles et al., Chapters 15-16

Wrapping Up: A Science of Politics?

12.. *Can Politics be Studied Scientifically?*

Political science as a discipline combines empirical and philosophical enterprises. In this concluding section we return to a question posed earlier in the semester and address the issue of whether and to what extent politics can be studied scientifically. Lectures and readings will explore conceptions of science, and an assessment of the appropriateness of the scientific method to the understanding of political phenomena will be given.

Recommended Reading for Political Science majors or intended majors:

Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," and "Science as a Vocation", in Hans Gerth and C.W. Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, NY: Oxford University Press, 1958 (and subsequently reprinted), pp. 75-156. This is a difficult but rewarding set of two essays in which Weber outlines an influential and provocative case for the separation of political activity/engagement from the scholarly study of politics (or other 'sciences'). It makes for interesting reading and I'd be delighted to talk about these two essays, and explore your reactions to them, if you'd read them and stop by the office. The book is available in the library's regular collection for anyone interested. This is supplemental reading only - it will not be covered on any exam for this course.

Class "Listserv" Etiquette

The listserv is intended to facilitate the flow of information within the class. Please be civil and use it responsibly.

Academic Integrity

All students are directed to the university's policy on academic integrity, incorporated in the undergraduate catalog, and available online at:

<http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/undergraduateeducation/studentrights.shtml>

Any violation of ethical standards by students in this course will be dealt with severely, in accordance with university guidelines.