

# PSI 1101-- Introduction to Political Science Syllabus

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Class Meetings: TBD  
Office Hours: by appointment

## Course Description:

The course is an introduction to political science in globalized world, which will explore the political behavior of human beings and how they relate to one another through the practice of politics. The course will give students tools to analyze the political institutions human devise in conduct of politics and the outcomes across the world, as well as how political behaviors, institutions and outcomes vary across time and across countries. The course will mostly be focusing on democratic and partially democratic countries and expose students to basic theoretical ideas and research methods in political science. Each subsequent week will be devoted to a substantive topic, where a more detailed analysis of political behavior, institutions and outcome will be presented. Starting with Week 2, an interactive element will be introduced where students will be required to adopt a country of their choice, will become an expert on the political behavior, institutions and outcomes in their adopted countries in order to provide material and knowledge for class discussion.

## Course Objectives:

This main objectives of this course are to

- 1- introduce students to main differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes and between different modes of democratic government;
- 2- introduce students to how political preferences are formed, how voters behave, how political parties compete and how interest groups form and how electoral systems shape political behavior;
- 3- explain how political institutions work, such as presidential and parliamentary systems, federalism, courts, central banks and coalitions.

## Learning Outcomes:

By completing this course, students will be able to

- 1- read and understand contemporary issues of their local, national and international environment and thinking critically about the interdependency of those different ecologies;

- 2- gain a foundation in the discipline of political science and learn analytical tools that are employed in social science in general;
- 3- describe how different political institutional designs work;
- 4- explain how political behavior and institutions shape policy outcomes, such as economic performance, public spending, environmental policies and immigration.

### **“Adopt a Country”**

Students will be asked to “adopt a country”- that is choosing any country that is any country in the world that is democratic or partially democratic, but cannot be his/her home country. Students will be asked to become a country expert on the political behavior, institutions or the outcomes of this adopted country, respond to the interactive tasks assigned to their chosen week and to contribute with material and information about their adopted country during rest of the course. Students should start acquiring knowledge about their adopted country from the first week of classes and should continue acquiring more knowledge about their adopted country throughout the course.

The adopted country must be democratic or partially democratic. Also students need to bear in mind that information about its politics and political institutions of the country has to be readily accessible and this should be in a language that is understandable. It perhaps best not to adopt newly formed or newly democratic countries, as they may not be enough history of democratic institutions to help students respond to the interactive tasks satisfactorily. One of the best places to find out information about the adopted countries is online, especially news sites, Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias. You will also find that the readings assigned discuss events in specific countries, which would be a good starting point.

By the end of the course the students should have a very good knowledge of the political system of their adopted country. This can act as a rich source of evidence when it comes to thinking about the topics that are discussed in class and also answering essay questions in the final examination.

### **Course Requirements:**

- 1- Participation (15%)
- 2- Midterm Exam (30%)
- 3- Student Presentations (15%)
- 4- Country Briefs (10%)
- 5- Final Exam (30%)

**Participation:** Students are expected to actively engage with the course material and reflect on the readings during the class in a civil and respectful manner. Attendance to class alone will not be enough to guarantee the participation points, 15% of the final grade; regular and informed participation is expected. Contribution to the interactive task discussion is also

considered as part of the participation grade. In addition, the instructor may also give pop-up (unannounced) quizzes and assess them as part of the participation grade.

**Student Presentations on “adopted country”:** During week 1, each student will adopt a country to become an expert of her or his adopted country and select a week to present. Country experts are expected to respond to the *interactive task* assigned to each week by gaining expertise of the political behaviors, political institutions or political outcomes of their adopted country. Particular to the week’s interactive task, the presenter is expected to provide material and knowledge and present his/her findings. Following the formal presentation, the presenter is also expected to lead a discussion involving his/her fellow country experts to address the questions iterated in that week’s interactive task. Presentations will commence in the second week of the course and will make up 15% of the final grade.

### **Country Briefs:**

You will be assigned two country briefs (each with minimum 600-700 words) during the semester. They will extended written analyses of the Interactive tasks of Weeks 4 and 8 respectively (please see below). They are due by Week 5 and Week 9 first day of class respectively. Any unexcused late submission will result in an automatic reduction of final grade by half. Country briefs will make up 10% of the grade. All written assignments need to be typed and in Word document, hand written assignments will not be accepted.

### **Course Materials:**

There is a textbook that some of the theoretical readings come from: Kay Lawson (2006) *The Human Polity: A Comparative Introduction to Political Science*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.). Since political science is an evolving discipline that is constantly interacting with its environment, global changes such as civil wars and environmental changes, the course readings include some more contemporary articles from various journals, reports, news sites and online outlets such as blogs, podcasts, etc. Reading a daily newspaper or news outlet in print form or digitally, is the best way to make sure that students of politics remain in tune with the changes in the arena.

THE DIGITAL COPIES OF THE READINGS WILL BE POSTED ON THE MCDANIEL **BLACKBOARD** DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF CLASSES.

### **Course Policies and Rule of Conduct:**

- Make up exams will be given under extraordinary circumstances. If such circumstances arise for the final exam, please contact the instructor via email immediately. The instructor reserves the right to request documentation to support your emergency claim and absence.
- Late assignments will not be accepted unless under extreme circumstances. Again, the instructor reserves the right to request documentation to support your emergency claim and absence. Late assignments are due to grade reduction, which

will be decided by the instructor. Papers should be submitted both as electronic and hard copies.

- In classroom following rules of conduct need to be adhered to:
  - o Students are expected to arrive on time;
  - o If a student needs to leave early, the instructor needs to be notified in advance;
  - o Students should not walk in and out of classroom at will;
  - o Electronic devices should not be interruptive and need to be silenced;
  - o Class discussion need to remain respectful;

## **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Cheating and plagiarism are prohibited at McDaniel. They undermine the academic integrity upon which this institution is built upon. Plagiarism is misusing or presenting other's work as one's own. One must therefore always acknowledge any idea that is not one's own and reference all work at all possible circumstances. Please consult the McDaniel's "Honor Code" for further information.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week I- Introduction and What is Political Science?**

#### **Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) "The Scope of Politics" pp. 4-14

### **Week II- Basics: Political Culture and Values**

**(Interactive Task:** Choose a country that you are interested in and that is democratic or partially democratic but is not your home country. This is going to become your 'adopted country' throughout this course. Find out about the "political culture" of your adopted country. What type of "subnational" differences are there in your adopted country that effect political behavior such as ethnicity, regional, etc...?)

#### **Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) "Politics and Culture" pp. 63- 83.

### **Week III- Basics: Why are some countries Democratic?**

**(Interactive Task:** Look up your country's Democracy score from the Freedom House database, "Freedom in the World."

#### **Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) "Prospects for Global Democracy" pp. 359- 370.

Krastev, I. and Holmes, S. (2019). "How Liberalism became the god that failed in eastern Europe," in The Guardian. 24 October.

#### **Week IV- Basics: Political Science Explanations and Methods**

**(Interactive Task:** Propose a *research question* relating to your adopted country and choose either a quantitative method or a qualitative method in order to study this question. Explain why you would use either of these methods for this research question. Note: You are not required to do the research!)

#### **Required Readings:**

Simon Hix and Matthew Whiting. *Introduction to Political Science*, pp. 12-27, “What is Political Science?: Explanations in Political Science.”

#### **Week V- Behaviour: Political Preferences and Voting Behaviour**

**(Interactive Task:** Identify the main cleavages that determined voting behavior in your adopted country between the start of the twentieth century and the 1960s. How did these emerge and become frozen? Looking at more recent voting behavior in your adopted country, do voters typically vote expressively or strategically? How can you begin to explain this voting behavior?)

#### **Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) “The Individual’s Motives for Participation in Politics” pp. 90- 93 and “Voter Turnout,” pp.94- 100.

*The Atlantic*. (2017) “The Growing Urban Rural Divide Around the World: How Politics Pits Demographic Groups Around the World.” (4 January)

#### **Week VI- Behaviour: Political Parties and Electoral Systems**

**(Interactive Task:** Identify the electoral system used in your adopted country. What are the political consequences of this electoral system in terms of the trade-offs examined in this chapter and how does it shape the voting behavior of voters from your adopted country?)

#### **Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) “Electoral Systems,” pp. 100- 105, and “Political Parties,” pp. 138-149.

#### **Week VII- *Midterm Exam***

#### **Week VIII- Behaviour: Political Participation, Interest Groups and Social Movements**

**(Interactive Task:** Name an interest group in your adopted country and present a timeline: how is it formed, how is it organized, what are its main goals and how effective has it been on your adopted country’s politics and policy outcomes?)

**Required Readings:**

*The Atlantic*. (2015) “How Corporate Lobbyists Conquered American Democracy.” (20 April)

Lawson. (2006) “Interest Groups,” pp. 115- 126.

*Greek News Agenda*. (2017) “Rethinking Greece: Donatella Della Porta on Social Movements and Electoral Democracy in Times of Austerity.” (22 April)

**Week IX- Institutions: Presidents and Parliaments, Coalitions and Single Party Governments**

(**Interactive Task:** Identify the political system of your adopted country and do you think this is a good match for your adopted country’s population)

**Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) “The Relationship between Legislative and Executive Power,” pp. 201-210

*April 6- 13, 2020- Easter Holiday: No classes*

**Week X- Institutions: Federalism, Decentralization and Independent Institutions**

(**Interactive Task:** Is your adopted country a federation or is everything governed from the center? What are the names of the sub units, and how much power do they hold?)

**Required Readings:**

Lawson. (2006) “Unitary, Federal and Con-federal Political Systems,” pp. 304- 310.

Lawson. (1995) “Center vs. Periphery: Dilemmas of Decentralization,” pp. 449- 456.

**Week XI- Outcomes: Economic Performance and Public Spending**

(**Interactive Task:** Is it the economy, stupid? Explain how economic concerns determine election outcomes. Secondly, give examples of “success cases” and “epic failures” from decisions made by elected politicians about public spending, i.e. the welfare state, large infrastructure projects and redistributive measures from your adopted country)

**Required Readings:**

Dani Rodrik. (2016) “The Return of Public Investment”, *Project Syndicate*, (13 January).

*The Economist*. (2013) “Venezuela After Chavez: Now for the Reckoning.” (5 March)

**Week XII- Outcomes: Environmental Protection and Migration**

(**Interactive Task:** Environmental disasters are often linked to mass influxes of refugees. How responsive is your adopted country’s government and independent institutions to climate change? Do individuals or specific groups have right in taking legal action to protect the environment?)

**Required Readings:**

“The Middle of Nowhere, Act 1” *This American Life*, listen online at <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/253/the-middle-of-nowhere?act=1#play>

Daniel Trilling. (2018) “Five Myths about the Refugee Crisis,” *The Guardian*. (5 June).

**Week XIII- Outcomes: Human Rights and Inequality**

**(Interactive Task:** What is your adopted country’s human rights score? Look up your country’s score and assessment by global human rights agencies such as the Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Have human rights and freedoms improved or suffered over time? What did your adopted country do to address issues of inequality, are there specific policies, programs, measures adopted? How active or pro-active are your adopted country’s institutions in addressing questions of inequality globally and domestically?)

**Required Readings:**

Micheline Ishay. (2007) “Human Rights: Historical and Contemporary Controversies,” in *The Human Rights Reader*. (London: Routledge), pp. xxi-xxviii.

Ernest Aryeetey and Zenia Lewis. (2010) “African Land Grabbing: Whose Interests Are Served?” *Brookings*. (25 June).

**Week XIV- Film Viewing and Review**

**May 18- 22, 2020      Final Exams**