

San José State University
Department of Political Science
Essentials of U.S. and California Government
POLS 15, Section 1, SJSU Catalog Code 23236
Spring 2021

Instructor:	Donna Crane
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Office hours:	Tuesday/Thursday 10:30 am to noon or by appointment
Class days/time:	Tuesday/Thursday 9 am to 10:15 am
GE/SJSU Studies Category:	US2, US3, D3

Course Format:

The class will meet on Zoom. We will have a combination of lecture, active discussion and debate, small-group work, writing, and reading (assignments listed below plus other occasional items assigned in class and/or via Canvas). Students are expected to have completed the assigned reading in advance of the week's classes.

Course Description:

From the SJSU Catalog: Treatment of essentials of U.S. and California government. Satisfaction of the American Institutions requirement in U.S. Constitution (US2) and California Government (US3), and the Core GE requirement in Social Sciences: Social Issues (D3). GE Area: D3, and American Institution Requirement: US2 and US3.

In this course we will learn about the structures and systems of U.S. and California governments, discuss key players in American politics and how they influence critical policy issues, and debate the current state of our nation's democracy.

Course and GE Learning Objectives (CLOs and GELOs):

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

GELO 1 (US2): Explain how political decisions are made, their consequences for individuals and society, and how individuals and groups may affect the decision-making process. Analyze the meaning and content of the democratic process as it has evolved in the United States and California and describe the foundations of the political system and the evolving institutions of government, the links between the people and government, and the operations of California government.

GELO 2 (US3): Identify the tools of political action and collective decision making at the local, state, national, and global level and articulate the values and assumptions that inform their civic engagement.

GELO 3 (D3): Place contemporary developments in cultural, historical, environmental, and spatial contexts.

GELO 4 (D3): Identify the dynamics of ethnic, cultural, gender/sexual, age-based, class, regional, national, transnational, and global identities and the similarities, differences, linkages, and interactions between them.

GELO 5 (D3): Evaluate social science information, draw on different points of view, and formulate applications appropriate to contemporary social issues.

GELO 6 (D3): Apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels.

Students' achievement of these learning outcomes will be assessed as follows:

GE Student Learning Outcome	Assessment
GELO 1	Two exams, a 1000-word term paper, and two short writing assignments
GELO 2	Two exams, a 1000-word term paper, and two short writing assignments
GELO 3	A 1000-word term paper and two short writing assignments
GELO 4	A 1000-word term paper and two short writing assignments
GELO 5	A 1000-word term paper and two short writing assignments
GELO 6	A 1000-word term paper
GE writing requirement (1500 words)	Two exams, a 1000-word term paper, and two short writing assignments

Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PSPLOs):

Successful completion of this course satisfies the following Political Science Program Learning Outcomes:

- Breadth: Students should possess a broad knowledge of the theory and methods of the various branches of the discipline.

- Application and Disciplinary Methods: Students should be able to formulate research questions, engage in systematic literature searches using primary and secondary sources, evaluate research studies, and critically analyze and interpret influential political texts. Students should be able to apply these techniques to identify, understand, and analyze domestic and international political issues and organizations.
- Communication Skills: Students should master basic competencies in oral and written communication skills and be able to apply these skills in the context of political science. This means communicating effectively about politics and/or public administration, public policy, and law.
- Citizenship: Students should acquire an understanding of the role of the citizen in local, state, national, and global contexts and appreciate the importance of lifelong participation in political processes.

Required Textbooks:

Please purchase the following, both of which should be available from the SJSU bookstore:

- *American Government and Politics Today* by Barbara Bardes, Mack Shelley II, and Steffen Schmidt (Brief). Either the 10th or 11th edition is fine. (10th edition: ISBN-13: 9781337559706; 11th edition looseleaf: ISBN-13: 9780357459133; 11th edition paperback: ISBN-13: 9780357459065.)
- *California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach* by Larry Gerston and Terry Christensen. Either the 14th or 15th edition is fine. (14th edition: ISBN-13: 9781285874524; 15th edition paperback: ISBN-13: 9780357139301; 15th edition ebook: ISBN-13: 9780357141588.)

Other brief readings may be assigned throughout the course; links will be provided.

Library Liaison:

The library liaison for Political Science is available to answer questions and provide one-on-one help learning using the library's online resources for research:

Paul Kauppila
University Librarian (Political Science Liaison)
408.808.2042
Paul.Kauppila@sjsu.edu

The [Political Science subject guide](#) is also a useful resource for finding library sources relevant to this class.

Workload and Credit Hour Requirements:

In accordance with SJSU [policy](#), success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per

week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course-related activities.

Grading Information:

Following are the course assignments, with associated point values. See below for further detail about each item:

Assignment	Point value
Term paper	100
Midterm	75
Final exam	75
Short writing assignments (2)	50
Class preparation & participation	50
Total points possible	350

Determination of Grades:

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A plus	97 to 100 percent	338 to 350 points
A	92 to 96 percent	321 to 337 points
A minus	90 to 91 percent	314 to 320 points
B plus	87 to 90 percent	303 to 313 points
B	82 to 86 percent	286 to 302 points
B minus	80 to 81 percent	279 to 285 points
C plus	77 to 80 percent	268 to 278 points
C	72 to 76 percent	251 to 267 points
C minus	70 to 71 percent	244 to 250 points
D plus	67 to 70 percent	233 to 243 points

D	62 to 66 percent	216 to 232 points
D minus	60 to 61 percent	209 to 215 points

Term Paper:

Each student should research and write a paper on the topic of his/her choice related to our course material. *This paper should not be an “overview” of an issue; it must take a clear position and defend it with data and arguments.* It should be no less than 1000 words (about four pages, double-spaced). Early in the course, I will circulate a list of possible topic ideas; students may choose from the list or, even better, propose a different subject for approval. Deadlines associated with the term paper are listed in the course schedule below. Additionally, if you give me a week’s turnaround time, I am happy to review an early outline of your paper and provide feedback on its direction, with no impact on the grade. Top scores will be awarded to papers that have an interesting, challenging, and timely topic; persuasively argue a point of view; present the issue clearly; use outside reference materials correctly; and are well-organized and free of syntax, grammar, and typo errors. Maximum points possible: 100.

Midterm Exam:

The midterm exam will test students on the material covered in the first half of the course. The exam usually consists of multiple-choice questions plus one short essay question. This is a strictly closed-note test, conducted on the honor system. Maximum points possible: 75.

Final Exam:

Here is SJSU’s policy on [final exams](#). The final exam will test students on material covered in the second half of the course. The exam usually consists of multiple-choice questions plus one short essay question. This is a strictly closed-note test, conducted on the honor system. Maximum points possible: 75.

Short Writing Assignments:

During the course I will assign two short writing assignments on topics related to current events and/or material covered in our work. The length of each writing assignment may vary but generally won’t exceed one page, single-spaced/two pages, double-spaced. Each assignment will have a turnaround time of at least one week. Maximum points possible: 50.

Class Preparation & Participation:

Throughout the course, I will post pop questions and discussion boards on Canvas, and assign small tasks that relate to our course work. These activities are intended to encourage students to keep current with the reading and participate actively in class discussions, which are critical to success in the course. Point values will vary but will be low-stakes. Moreover, although there is a cap on the number of participation points you can earn, I will offer more opportunities than the maximum points possible so an occasional class (or task) can be missed over the course of the semester without significant penalty. Maximum points possible: 50.

Extra Credit:

There may be a limited number of small extra credit opportunities in this class (not to exceed about 20 points total). Details of these assignments, if offered, will be given in class and posted on Canvas. Additionally, I may award extra-credit points (usually no more than five or 10 in total) to students who distinguish themselves by consistently, actively, positively participating in class discussions.

Late Work and Make-Up Policies:

In an effort to be fair to all students, late work and exam absences will be handled as follows:

Term papers are considered on time if they are submitted by the due date/time. Papers received after the deadline will be considered late and will be deducted 10 points each day.

Short writing assignments are considered on time if they are submitted by the due date/time. Assignments received after the deadline will be considered late and will be deducted two points each day.

If you face a serious illness that renders you unable to complete one or more of the written work assignments described above on time, you must notify me in writing before the assignment is due. Exceptions to this are only allowed in cases of documented medical emergency.

Students with a compelling need to reschedule the midterm or final exam must discuss this with me in advance and have the absence pre-approved - in which case we will agree on an alternate test date. Reasons that would merit a pre-approved absence are: a serious medical condition, religious holiday, pre-approved university-sanctioned event or activity, military orders, or family emergency. The only excuse for missing an exam without pre-approval is a documented medical emergency. With only these exceptions, a missed exam cannot be made up and will result in zero points. Please plan accordingly.

Class preparation & participation points cannot be made up or turned in late. As noted above, more than 50 points will be offered in order to allow an occasional missed answer/task without significant penalty.

Questions, concerns, or have a situation not addressed above? Please ask!

Classroom Protocol:

Although Zoom attendance per se cannot be a grading factor, students who prioritize attendance in this course will be at an advantage, because material covered in class will subsequently be tested in exams. Moreover, as noted above, pop questions will be given on Canvas - often during class time - in order to encourage students to stay current in the course reading and lectures/discussion, so those not present will be unlikely to earn those points.

I do not share my classroom slides but I will post a study guide for each main topic we discuss in class on Canvas. Students report that these are valuable study tools for exam prep and I hope you will agree.

Recording of Class and Public Sharing of Instructor Material:

Consistent with SJSU policy, because course material is my intellectual property, recording in this class is allowed only with my written permission, and will be granted only on a class-by-class basis if the student justifies the need to record the lectures. Similarly, students must obtain written permission from any guest speaker and every class member in order to record presentations or class discussions.

Political Science Departmental Writing Policy:

Students of political science should develop the ability to write in clear, grammatical English. Spelling and grammar count! Students must take care that appropriate citations are used. Direct quotations must be so indicated with quotation marks and a specific reference to the page in the source from which it was taken. Failure to cite your sources constitutes academic misconduct, which carries serious sanctions. A tutorial on citations is available at the library website [here](#). For assistance with writing, please see me or contact the [Writing Center](#).

Additionally: all the work produced in this class must be yours alone, and must be original to this course. If you would like to build on your own previous academic work, see me for the correct ways to do so. Failure to cite your own previous work may constitute academic misconduct.

University Policies:

As a reminder, SJSU has [policies](#) on many important topics including attendance and academic integrity. If you have questions about any of this material, please ask.

Course Schedule:

Dates	Discussion topics	Reading/Listening/Watching assignments (please complete them <i>before</i> the scheduled class dates)
January 28	Introduction to the course	Syllabus
February 2, 4	Introduction to government and politics The Constitution and Bill of Rights	Bardes, chapters 1, 2
February 9, 11	The Constitution and Bill of Rights	Bardes, chapter 3 Listen to this podcast (56 minutes)
February 16, 18	The Constitution and Bill of Rights Civil liberties	Bardes, chapter 4

February 23, 25	Civil liberties FEB 23: TERM PAPER THESIS STATEMENTS DUE	n/a
March 2, 4	Voting rights Three major civil rights movements	Watch this video (15 minutes) and this video (4 minutes) Bardes, chapter 5 Watch this video (3 minutes)
March 9, 11	Three major civil rights movements	Watch these videos: here (1 minute) and here (1 minute)
March 16, 18	Three branches of government	Bardes, chapters 9, 10, 12
March 23, 25	Three branches of government Midterm prep MARCH 25: MIDTERM	No assigned readings. Come with any questions or requests to review material before the midterm.
April 6, 8	American ideology Political parties Measuring public opinion	Bardes, chapters 6, 8
April 13, 15	Campaigns and elections: federal and California	Gerston/Christensen, chapters 1, 2, 3
April 20, 22	Political disinformation Interest groups	Watch this video (25 minutes) Read this blog post Bardes, chapter 7
April 27, 29	APRIL 27: TERM PAPERS DUE Domestic policy	Bardes, chapter 13
May 4, 6	Foreign policy California politics and government	Bardes, chapter 14 Gerston/Christensen, chapters 4-10 Listen to the three episodes of this podcast (total: 68 minutes)
May 11, 13	Is our democracy broken?	Read this opinion piece and this survey

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	Final exam prep	Come with any questions or requests to review material before the final exam.
May 20, 7:15 am to 9:30 am	FINAL EXAM	n/a

Note: This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice provided through Canvas and/or classroom announcement.