

**San José State University**  
**Political Science Department**  
**Political Science 190: Senior Seminar**  
**Spring 2021**

**Course and Contact Information**

Instructor: Dr. Sara Benson  
Class Day/Time: Mondays 9:00 – 10:15  
Join URL: <https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/88251328499>  
Email: sara.benson@sjsu.edu  
Office Hours: Mondays, 10:30 – 11:30 via Zoom  
<https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/91088094738>  
Password: 306955  
Prerequisites: POLS 100W and POLS 100M, or instructor consent

**Course Description**

From the catalog: Culminating experience for the political science major. Seminar class with significant participation required. Specific course topics vary each semester. Prerequisites: POLS 100W and POLS 100M or instructor consent. A minimum grade of C- is required to fulfill the BA Political Science capstone requirement.

This is an integrative capstone course in political science. As a culminating experience, the course is designed as a study of power and mass incarceration. We will explore the relationship between imprisonment and democracy as well as the political and racial consequences of mass incarceration.

**POLS 190H**

Pols 190H is an additional unit of upper division credit and is open to students with a 3.2 overall GPA and a 3.5 GPA in Political Science. Honor students must write a longer research paper (25-30 pages) and must submit a working draft of the paper (10-15 pages) for my review mid-semester.

**Required Texts/Readings**

Textbooks can be purchased online or at the SJSU Bookstore. Three books are required:

Angela Y. Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (ISBN 9781583225813)  
Scott Reynolds Nelson's, *Steel Drivin Man* (ISBN 9780195341195)  
Danielle Sered's *Until We Reckon* (ISBN 9781620974797)

In addition, other required readings are available on [Canvas \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/). For help with using Canvas see [Canvas Student Resources page \(http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student\\_resources\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/canvas/student_resources). For technical problems with Canvas, please contact [eCampus \(https://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/support/\)](https://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/support/).

## **Course Format**

This course is a hybrid course. This means that we spend some of our time doing synchronous (“live”) Zoom meetings (Mondays at 9am) and some of our time doing asynchronous online work, including discussion boards. Live sessions will not be recorded in part because this is a seminar. Seminars are different from lecture courses and they require a different kind of teaching. If we were all in the same room this semester, we would be seated in a circle, looking at each other and talking to each other about the texts. We will take the same approach in this virtual seminar, which means that you will need to have your camera on. I will introduce or set up the readings at the end of the previous class session but generally speaking you will be expected to carry the discussion during our live class meetings. This means that you need to come prepared to engage in a conversation about particular themes and passages from the readings. Before each class, you will already have created a reading summary using your favorite passages as well as a list of themes or questions, and you should draw from these notes and maps of the text as you participate in this course.

\*If you don’t have access to a laptop or a camera, SJSU has a free [Equipment Loan Program](https://www.sjsu.edu/learnanywhere/equipment/index.php) available for students (<https://www.sjsu.edu/learnanywhere/equipment/index.php>). Please see me if you have questions.

## **Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)**

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

CLO 1: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different approaches to the study of mass incarceration as a structure of power that changes over time;

CLO 2: understand and critique competing theoretical explanations of prison reform and prison abolition and connect and apply those frameworks to contemporary problems;

CLO 3: read and critically analyze the literature on mass incarceration in political science and related fields in order to present and synthesize research during class discussions and formal presentations as well as in written work;

CLO 4: discuss and ask questions about history and democracy, structural inequality, and racial justice.

## **Political Science Program Learning Outcomes (PSPLO)**

Upon completion of the Political Science major program, students should be able to demonstrate the following 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.

### **University Policy Regarding Workload**

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 three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus. *Because this is a four-unit course, you can expect to spend a minimum of 12 hours per week on scheduled tutorials, assignments, or activities.*

### **Course Requirements and Assignments**

#### **Reading Summaries (as Discussion Posts) (40% of course grade) (CLO 1, 2, 3)**

Your reading summaries should be completed every week before class so that you can use them as a basis for class discussion. You should *summarize* the reading/s in one substantive double-spaced page *without using any sources from the internet*. Then, *analyze* the reading/s in another double-spaced page, and create a list of 3-5 comprehensive discussion questions *or a list of themes*. In your summary and analysis, move back and forth between paraphrase and direct citation so that you have quick access to any passages that you found interesting or intriguing. You should refer us to those passages during our live class discussions.

#### **Reading Presentation (15% of course grade) (CLO 1, 2, 3, 4)**

Students will be assigned (likely with one other student) to give a brief presentation on the readings during a particular day of the course. The presentation should be limited to 5 minutes and primarily consist of putting themes on the table for conversation. It can be based on your Reading Summary for that week but needs to do the additional work of synthesis—presentation themes should create connections or illuminate tensions between and among “the literature,” which means reminding us how all of the readings for this course connect as we add new layers and new understandings of this problem every week. This quick presentation is really about jumpstarting the conversation by presenting *a set of themes* for discussion.

#### **Research Paper Proposal and Presentation (20% of course grade) (CLO 1, 3)**

Students will compose and present a brief research proposal in order to receive feedback on topics, frameworks, literatures, and the organization of the paper. Students should also be prepared on at least two occasions during class to discuss the progress and problems of their research. See Canvas for details.

#### **Research Paper (30% of course grade) (CLO 1, 2, 3, 4)**

Students will submit a final research paper on an understudied aspect of mass incarceration. The paper should be a minimum of 20 pages in length.

### **Grading Information**

No extra credit is available.

## Grading Scale

93 to 100	A
90 to 92	A minus
87 to 89	B plus
83 to 86	B
80 to 82	B minus
77 to 79	C plus
73 to 76	C
70 to 72	C minus
63 to 69	D
60 to 62	D minus
less than 60	F

## University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

*Please review the information about university policies on plagiarism contained above, which may result in a failing grade. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development.*

## Classroom Protocol

*Students should attend all class meetings and participate in class exercises. Please be respectful of your colleagues in class discussions and during peer exercises. Discussion board discourse should always be professional, respectful, and even generous in this community of ideas.*

*If you have to miss class for any reason, you are expected to view any recordings in the relevant modules to get caught up. I will not record the workshops themselves, but I may record portions of the class when I explain upcoming assignments. Any videos remain protected by the instructor's copyright, and students are prohibited by university policy (S12-7) from recording, distributing, or posting any part of these videos. Students who violate this policy can be referred to Student Conduct.*

*You are required to use your full name as your Zoom name and your camera should be on. This is a seminar and there are 15 students enrolled. In a small class, your presence and active participation is required. Consider sitting in front of empty wall space to minimize distractions for others when you are on camera. Be professional in choosing your background. Please do your best to also minimize background noise. You will always be on mute by default. Note that I can see all "private" exchanges in the chat feature of Zoom and that they become part of the official transcript of the class. Finally, always be respectful of your colleagues during class discussions.*

## Political Science 190: Senior Seminar

*The schedule is subject to change with fair notice.*

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	2/1	Course Opening Assignment: Paul Rucker's "Proliferation"
2	2/8	Introduction to Critical Prison Studies Reading: Angela Davis, Introduction to <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> Assignment: Register for and attend SJSU's Human Rights Institute Keynote Lecture with Dr. Angela Davis (see Canvas for date and registration link)
3	2/15	Prison Reform and Prison Abolition Angela Davis, Chapter 3, "Imprisonment and Reform" in <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> Michel Foucault, excerpt from <i>Discipline and Punish</i> Assignment: View <i>The Last Graduation</i>
4	2/22	The Prison and Slavery as Congenital Institutions Angela Davis, Chapter 2, <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> Kim Gilmore, "Understanding the Connections" Ruffin v. Commonwealth [of Virginia], 1871 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Jesus Christ in Texas"
5	3/1	Thinking With History Scott Reynolds Nelson, <i>Steel Drivin Man</i>
6	3/8	Gender and Mass Punishment Angela Davis, Chapter 4, "How Gender Structures the Prison System," in <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> "Incite! Critical Resistance Statement on the Prison Industrial Complex"
7	3/15	The Prison Industrial Complex Angela Davis, Chapter 4, "The Prison Industrial Complex" in <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i> Alessandro De Giorgi, "Five Thesis on Mass Incarceration" Assignment: Ear Hustle Discussion Post

<b>8</b>	<b>3/22</b>	The Reach of the Carceral State/Research Paper Discussion  Katherine Beckett & Naomi Murakawa, “Mapping the Shadow Carceral State”  Elliot Young, “Caging Immigrants at McNeil Island Federal Prison”
<b>9</b>	<b>3/29</b>	Spring Break
<b>10</b>	<b>4/5</b>	Prisons, Protest, Colonialism  Alan Eladio Gomez, “‘Nuestras vidas corren casi paralelas’: Chicanos, Independentistas, and the Prison Rebellion Years in Leavenworth”  Alan Eladio Gómez, “Troubadour of Justice: An Interview with Raúl Salinas”
<b>11</b>	<b>4/12</b>	What Does Justice Look Like?  Luana Ross, “Worlds Collide,” from <i>Inventing the Savage</i> Waziyatawin, excerpt from <i>What Does Justice Look Like?</i>  RaeDeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda, “The Carceral Landscape in Hawai’i”
<b>12</b>	<b>4/19</b>	Feedback Session I
<b>13</b>	<b>4/26</b>	Feedback Session 2
<b>14</b>	<b>5/3</b>	<i>Until We Reckon</i>
<b>15</b>	<b>5/10</b>	<i>Until We Reckon</i> /Visualizing Abolition
<b>16</b>	<b>5/17</b>	Course Closing

*\*Final Due Wednesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 am*