



**SAN JOSÉ STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

# **POLS 15: Essentials of US and California Government**

SPRING 2022

**PROFESSOR MARCI HARRIS**

San José State University Department of Political Science  
**POLS 15–12: Essentials of U.S. and California Government**  
SPRING 2022

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Class Days / Time:	Monday & Wednesdays 3:00–4:15 PM
Class Format	In-person lecture (after March 1, 2022)
Classroom:	Clark Building 204
Canvas Link:	<a href="https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1476703">https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1476703</a>
Zoom Link (for virtual class until Feb 14, 2022)	<a href="https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/89449247632?pwd=MXpaQ0JqdTFHYnN2d096VIU4eIlHUT09">https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/89449247632?pwd=MXpaQ0JqdTFHYnN2d096VIU4eIlHUT09</a>

*This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.  
Any changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.  
It is the student's responsibility to check Canvas regularly for announcements and updates.*

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## Course Description

Introduces students to the public policy making process in the American governing system. The politics of agenda setting, policy formulation, and policy implementation are examined. Students learn to analyze and evaluate public policy outcomes.

## Course Format

In-person lecture course (virtual until February 14, 2022, due to Covid-19)

## Course Goals

Hello and welcome to POLS-15! My goal in this course is for you to truly understand the underlying history, principles, contradictions and ever-changing conditions of American and California government — not just to pass a test but to contribute throughout your lives to making these systems work better! I want this course to prepare you to confidently participate in civic life — whether discussions, elections, advocacy or simply as an active community member — with a grounding in how we got to where we are and ideas about how we can do better in the future.

## MySJSU

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on the Canvas Learning Management System course website. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU to learn of any updates.

Course link: <https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1476703>

## Learning Outcomes

“Social Science courses should increase the student’s understanding of human behavior and social interaction in the context of value systems, economic structures, political institutions, social groups, and natural environments.” — SJSU General Education Requirements description of “Area D. Social Sciences”

([https://catalog.sjsu.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=12&poid=3623#dsocialsciences](https://catalog.sjsu.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=12&poid=3623#dsocialsciences))

“Courses in American Institutions should expose students to alternative interpretations of the historical events and political processes that have shaped the social, economic, and political systems in which we live.” — SJSU Undergraduate University Graduation Requirements (<https://catalog.sjsu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=4149#american-institutions-ai->)

## General Education Learning Outcomes (GELO)

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

1. **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. **Assessed by multiple-choice and essay questions in two exams, Canvas writing activities and video project.**
2. **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. **Assessed by multiple-choice questions in two exams and the Canvas activities.**
3. **GELO 3 (D3):** Place contemporary developments in cultural, historical, environmental, and spatial contexts. **Assessed by video project and Canvas activities.**
4. **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. **Assessed by multiple-choice and essay questions in two exams and Canvas activities.**
5. **GELO 5 (D3):** Evaluate social science information, draw on different points of view, and formulate applications appropriate to contemporary social issues. **Assessed by video project and Canvas activities.**
6. **GELO 6 (D3):** Apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels. **Assessed by essay questions in two exams and Canvas activities.**

## Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

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

- Understand and describe the philosophical and historical foundations of the U.S. and California governing systems. This includes understanding the origin and describing ideas and key concepts that were incorporated into founding documents such as natural rights, rule of law, separation of powers, and federalism.
- Understand and analyze the evolution of government institutions, including the structure, powers, limitations and actions of the three branches of government and the relationship and jurisdictional boundaries between federal, state and local levels of government.
- Understand and describe the unique agreements, relationships and emerging issues among the U.S. and tribal governments and non-state districts and territories
- Understand, remember and describe key elements of the Bill of Rights and examples of historical denials and limitations on those rights. The student should also be able to identify people, events, movements, laws, court decisions and cultural changes that have led to expansion or new understandings of these rights and their applicability
- Understand the rights, duties and privileges of citizens in the U.S. and California governing system, including electoral activities such as joining a party, supporting candidates and voting; advocacy activities such as grassroots outreach, interest groups, lobbying and raising public awareness; civic engagement in nonpartisan activities such as public comment periods, participatory opportunities and community projects; legal requirements such as jury duty, selective service and emerging discussions of a potential national service requirement.
- Understand California's political, electoral, and institutional dynamics and California's influence and position — as the most populous state in the U.S., within the federal system.
- Understand and analyze current political topics in the context of evolving political institutions and standards

## Required Texts / Readings

### Textbook

- Glen Krutz and Sylvie Waskiewicz, **American Government 3e** @ OpenStax, Jul 28, 2021, ISBN-13: 978-1-711493-96-1  
<https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-3e>
- Larry N. Gerston, Terry Christensen, **California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach**, 2016, 14th Edition. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, ISBN-13: 978-1305-95349-9

### Other Readings

- Other readings will be posted in Canvas as assigned

*Course material developed by the instructor is the intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be shared publicly without his/her approval. You may not publicly share or upload instructor generated material for this course such as exam questions, lecture notes, or homework solutions without instructor consent.*

### Technical Requirements

- Each student must have an email address that they check regularly.
- Classwide notifications will be sent through Canvas and it is the student's responsibility to stay up-to-date.

### Library Liaison

Liaison for Political Science: Paul Kauppila (Paul.Kauppila@sjsu.edu)  
University Librarian (Political Science Liaison) (408) 808-2042  
Political Science subject guide: <http://libguides.sjsu.edu/politicalscience>

### Political Science Departmental Writing Policy and SJSU Writing Center

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 with it serious sanctions. A tutorial on citations is available at the library website at [http://www.sjlibrary.org/services/literacy/info\\_comp/citing.htm](http://www.sjlibrary.org/services/literacy/info_comp/citing.htm).

For assistance with writing, visit the SJSU Writing Center located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment, visit the Writing Center website at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>.

## Political Science Scholarships

“The Political Science Department is fortunate to be able to award more than 10 scholarships to our students each year — this is an extraordinary level of support that surpasses what any other department on campus can offer. The scholarships were created by generous benefactors—often former faculty, students, and friends of the department—who desired to ease the financial burden on our students as they seek to earn their degrees in Political Science. The department encourages all of our students to apply for one or more of these awards.”

(<http://www.sjsu.edu/polisci/scholarships/>)

## Course Requirements and Assignments

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. (University Policy S16-9

<https://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>)

## Assignments

10 (SHORT) WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS (not on test weeks or weeks when policy memos due)

**Due Sundays at midnight:** The prompt will be posted in Canvas on Monday. It may be a question, an article for discussion, or an assignment to watch a video or other content. The assignment will be to **write ~2 paragraphs (absolutely no more than 4) on the prompt.**

## MIDTERM EXAM

The midterm will consist of 30 multiple choice questions and two essays.

## CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT PROJECT (choice of video, slide deck, paper, or other type of presentation)

You will be assigned a congressional district at the beginning of the course.

Your assignment is to research the district and its current office-holder and to share information about the district in a format of your choice, which could include:

- A 3–6 minute video
- A paper between 800–2,000 words
- A slide deck (15–30 slides)
- Other medium (pending professor's approval)

## US POLICY MEMO

Imagine you are serving on the staff of the House Member you were assigned at the beginning of the course. Select a bill pending in Congress and draft a **2-page** policy paper making a recommendation to your boss.

## CA POLICY MEMO

Imagine you are serving on the staff of a Member of the California Legislature. Select a bill pending in the California Assembly or Senate and draft a **2-page** policy paper making a recommendation to your boss.

## FINAL EXAM

*Faculty members are required to have a culminating activity for their courses, which can include a final examination, a final research paper or project, a final creative work or performance, a final portfolio of work, or other appropriate assignment. ( <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S17-1.pdf> )*



## EXTRA CREDIT

Per Academic Senate policy, any extra credit opportunities must be extended to all students in the class; this means that individual appeals for extra credit may not be considered apart from the entire class. Students may not request individual extra assignments for additional credit. (<https://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S09-7.pdf>)

The course provides several opportunities to earn extra credit:

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY	DUE DATE	POSSIBLE POINTS
<b>Recite the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence</b>	Anytime before end of course	50
<b>Attend a town hall meeting with a public official and write about it (500-words)</b>	Anytime before end of course	75
<b>Watch a Congressional hearing and write about it (500-words)</b>	Anytime before end of course	75
<b>Turn in a substantive, organized, thorough class outline (digital or photocopy)</b>	End of course	100

## Grading Policy

GRADING FORMULA		
ASSIGNMENT	POSSIBLE POINTS	TOTAL
Participation (in class and on Canvas)	50	50
10 Weekly Assignments	25	250
Midterm Exam	200	200
Congressional District Project	100	100
US Policy Memo	100	100
CA Policy Memo	100	100
Final Exam	200	200
Extra Credit	300	

GRADING SCALE	
970–1000	A+
930–969	A
900–929	A-
870–899	B+
830–869	B
800–829	B-
770–799	C+
730–769	C
700–729	C-
630–699	D
600–629	D-
Below 599	F

\*\*This course must be passed with a C- or better as a CSU graduation requirement.

#### **CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

Attendance will not be taken. Participation — including participation in class discussions and in Canvas — is 5% of the final grade.

“Students are expected to attend all meetings for the courses in which they are enrolled as they are responsible for material discussed therein, and active participation is frequently essential to ensure maximum benefit to all class members. In some cases, attendance is fundamental to course objectives; for example, students may be required to interact with others in the class. Attendance is the responsibility of the student.”

“Participation may be used as a criterion for grading when the parameters and their evaluation are clearly defined in the course syllabus and the percentage of the overall grade is stated.”

<https://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-12.pdf>

## **MISSED EXAMS AND MISSED WORK**

Written assignments turned in past the due date/time will be eligible for half credit. Exceptions will be made for a documented medical emergency if the professor is notified in writing (via email) before the assignment is due.

No make-up, early, or late exams will be administered. If you miss an exam without a demonstrable excuse you will receive a 0. Missed final exams due to demonstrable medical, religious, or university related activities may be made up by prior arrangement only.

## **Class Protocol**

This is a course that will consider several controversial issues including diversity and minority rights in American politics, immigration and its effects on American politics and culture and the nature of citizenship. Students are expected to come prepared to class discussions and conduct themselves in a civil and respectful manner, especially to fellow students.

## **Course Rules**

1. Always maintain professional and respectful language — in class, in emails and in your coursework.
2. You are responsible for all information and announcements made in the course. Check Canvas every day for updates, changes, or new information. Course rules, schedule, and day-to-day are subject to change, please pay close attention to course announcements.
3. Written assignments turned in past the due date/time will be eligible for half credit.

## **University Policies**

Per [University Policy S16-9](#), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on Syllabus Information web page (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

## Disability Access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor ASAP. The Accessible Education Center (AEC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The AEC is located at One Washington Square in ADM 110 and can be reached by telephone (voice/408-924-6000, or by email at: [aec-info@sjsu.edu](mailto:aec-info@sjsu.edu) or [aec-exams@sjsu.edu](mailto:aec-exams@sjsu.edu)).

## Student disclosures of sexual violence

San Jose State University requires all incoming students to complete **Sexual Assault Prevention for Undergraduates** or **Sexual Assault Prevention for Graduate Students**, mandatory online sexual assault prevention trainings. Title IX requires higher education institutions to take necessary precautions to prevent sexual assault on their campuses, and to respond promptly and effectively when an assault is reported. To fully comply with Title IX, the CSU Chancellor's Office issued [Executive Order 1095](#) which mandates educational training programs to help prevent sexual violence. For more information and resources, go to: <http://notalone.sjsu.edu>

For more information go to: <http://www.sjsu.edu/wellness/onlinetraining/>

## Course Schedule

*This schedule is subject to change with fair notice.  
All changes and updates will be posted in Canvas.*

WEEK	Assignment / Activity	Due Date
WEEK 1	<b>Assignment #1</b> (in Canvas)	Jan 30 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 2	<b>Assignment #2</b> (in Canvas)	Feb 6 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 3	<b>Assignment #3</b> (in Canvas)	Feb 13 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 4	<b>Congressional District Project</b>	Feb 20 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 5	<b>Assignment #4</b> (in Canvas)	Feb 27 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 6	<b>Assignment #5</b> (in Canvas)	Mar 6 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 7	<b>Assignment #6</b> (in Canvas)	Mar 13 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 8	<b>US Policy Memo</b>	Mar 20 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 9	<b>MidTerm exam</b>	Mar 23 IN CLASS
MAR 28— MAR 30	<b>SPRING RECESS</b>	
WEEK 11	<b>Assignment #7</b> (in Canvas)	Apr 10 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 12	<b>Assignment #8</b> (in Canvas)	Apr 17 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 13	<b>Assignment #9</b> (in Canvas)	Apr 24 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 14	<b>Assignment #10</b> (in Canvas)	May 1 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 15	<b>CA Policy Memo</b>	May 8 @ 11:59 PM PT
WEEK 16	<b>No assignment</b>	
WEEK 17	<b>Final exam</b>	May 24 @ 12:15-2:30 PM