



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

POLS 150: Current World Problems

Call No. 11160

Room: Bentley Hall 132

Time: 12:10-2:00 PM, Tuesdays and Thursdays

Dr. Brandon Kendhammer

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Office: 215 Bentley Annex

Office Hours: Wednesday, 2-4 PM, and by appt.

Required Texts

*Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* (New York: WW Norton), ISBN: 978-0393338829

*Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York: Harper Perennial), ISBN: 978-0061479649

*Both texts are available from local textbook sellers and (at substantially reduced prices) from online retailers like Amazon.com. Each book costs less than \$9 (about \$17.50 for both) online, which is about the price you will pay for renting them both in Athens. I encourage you to purchase them (and at these prices, that shouldn't prove too much of a hardship for most of you), so that you may highlight/take notes in the text.

Important Deadlines

September 27: Policy Memo Workshop

September 29: Group Meetings, Memo Summaries/Bibliographies Due

October 13: Exam 1 (Over First Course Module)

November 1: Memos Due

November 10: Last day to complete 13th Reading Quiz

November 17: Exam 2 (Over Second Course Module), Memo Revisions Due

Course Objectives

This course, which is one of three introductory level (100) courses offered in the Political Science Department at Ohio University, is intended to serve three curricular purposes.

First, it is designed to introduce you to the issues and debates surrounding a pair of contemporary political controversies. These issues have been chosen by your instructor because they are of crucial domestic and international importance, because they are exceptionally complex yet unfamiliar to most college students, and because they provide insights into a range of other related political controversies.

Second, it is intended to begin a conversation about how to sift and winnow the mass of political information we encounter during our daily lives. In particular, the goal is to help you use the political information you come into contact with to form judgments and opinions based on reasoned consideration and evidence. This is an admirable goal no matter what your personal political beliefs might be.

Third and finally, it is intended to provide you some insight into the strategies, approaches, and methods employed by social scientists (especially political scientists!) to study and evaluate politics. Hopefully, this knowledge will make you more effective sifters and winnowers.

You will be evaluated on your substantive knowledge of our two “current world problems.”

More important will be your ability to synthesize many different sources of information, each with its own bias or point of view, in order to draw your own informed conclusions about how to solve political problems. You will also be expected to demonstrate an ability to evaluate the quality and reliability of information sources, and to debate the merits of the various theories and explanations we encounter in class. Finally, you will be evaluated on how clearly and persuasively you can communicate informed political opinion—in class discussion, in exam essays, and in a “policy memo.”

Where Does My Grade Come From?

Students in this course are assessed on their performance on three different types of assignments/exams, listed below (for a total of 300 points). Due dates are listed below and in the course schedule.

1. Online Reading Quizzes (50 points)
2. Two in-class Exams, each worth 75 points (150 points total)
3. A Policy Memo of 13-15 pages, prepared by groups of 5-6 students (with a bibliography and in-text citations) (Credit [pass/fail] for 1-2 page summary and bibliography, 100 points for final memo).

Online Reading Quizzes

The online reading quizzes will require you to demonstrate that you have completed the reading assignments in a timely manner, and that you have been attentive not only to the broad strokes of the author's arguments but the details, as well. There will be one on-line quiz (through Blackboard) for each class meeting after our introductory session (except for test days and the session cancelled for group meetings), or seventeen (17) in total. Each will involve four (4) multiple-choice questions. The quizzes will become available on Blackboard 24 hours before the class for which the reading is due begins, and will close 30 minutes before class. Each quiz may be taken only once, **and they may not be made up or taken late.**

You must **complete 13 of the 17** reading quizzes over the course of the quarter. Your overall grade will be based on the total number of correct answers you submit in those 13 quizzes, out of 50 possible points (since there are 52 possible quiz questions, a "perfect" score gives you a two point bonus). Your grade will be calculated on the first 13 quizzes you begin (which is how Blackboard records these things--it is not possible to "check" the questions before you officially begin the quiz). You cannot take extra quizzes beyond your required 13 for extra credit, and you

may not substitute the score of a 14th, 15th, 16th, or 17th quiz for one on which you did poorly. **Because you may miss 4 quizzes with no penalty, there will be no-make ups or alternate assignments, and no excuses related to technological gaffes or failures will be accepted. You are expected to have access to a working computer and a stable, reliable internet connection for this class.** A sample will be provided on Blackboard to demonstrate the format and the procedures for completing each quiz. To repeat: the score you earn for the first 13 quizzes you begin is the score you will earn, with no exceptions.

Exam Schedule and Exam Format

The exams for this course are scheduled on October 13 and November 17. The exam format will be identical for both exams, with a total of 75 possible points. Each will cover one unit of course material (the final will not be comprehensive).

Each exam will require you to:

- Identify and contextualize 3 key persons, events, or concepts (the “ID” questions) in four or five sentences (15 points)
- Respond to one (of a possible two) short answer questions on a specific idea or argument covered in lecture and the readings, in two to three paragraphs (20 points)
- Respond to one essay that requires you to synthesize all of the material from the unit into a coherent explanation and argument, and that includes your own (reasoned and evidentiarily supported) opinion on the matter (35 points).

Policy Memo

The policy memo is meant to give students a means of summarizing what they have learned and Students, working in groups of 5-6, will choose a significant “current world problem”—and create a (13-15 page, double spaced, 10/12 point font, 1" margins) memo that describes the problem (including who is affected and why), summarizes the arguments surrounding the issue, and provides recommendations for US governmental action.

An A policy memo will need to convey a sense of why the issue is of importance to the US and its citizens, summarize (and possibly explain the failures of) current policy efforts, and take a side in the debate by offering concrete and feasible recommendations for future action. The policy memo must also contain both an “executive summary” (a two paragraph summary of the issue and your finding that guides the reader through the memo’s outline) and 15 or more references to the work of experts in this field (peer-reviewed scholarly sources and policy briefs by government agencies and think tanks being the most common examples) and cited in the text of the memo and listed at the end. Neither the “executive summary” nor the list of references will count in the 13-15 page count.

We will devote one class session, on September 27, to the basic questions of how to write a policy memo. We will discuss what a policy memo is and how to choose a topic and present it to a policy-oriented audience. We will discuss how to conduct academic research for this kind of project, and how to locate and identify appropriate sources.

Class will be canceled on September 29 in order for each group to have a short meeting with me, at which time they will present their topic, a preliminary list of sources, and a brief timetable

for completing the memo, with individual work assignments for each group member (all of which should be presented in a typed, 2-3 page document). A first draft of the memo is due in class on November 1. The memos will be handed back the next week, and groups will submit revised memos on the day of the final (November 17).

I start out from the assumption that each student will contribute an equal share of the groups's effort towards the final product. I also recognize that, barring some supervision on my part, that this may not always be the case. Each group member will assess their own contribution, as well as that of their colleagues, based on a questionnaire each group member will fill out at the end of the project. In addition, each student will provide to me a short (one paragraph) description of their role in completing the memo, which I will use to cross-check the group's assessment. In the case of conflicts or disputes about group participation, I am the sole and final arbiter, and I reserve the right to adjust students' grades up or down depending on my reasoned assessment of their participation and effort in group activities. **I also reserve the right to remove group members who are not participating from their groups following each group's submission of their topic statement and lists of sources. Students removed from groups for a lack of participation will be required to submit their own 8-10 page policy memo individually.**

Grading Scale

The following final point totals will be converted to the following letter grades at the end of the quarter. Please note that "But I'm one/two points away from an A (A-...B+...etc.)..." will not be considered valid grounds for the adjustment of this scale.

- 300-275 points = A
- 274-265 points = A-
- 264-255 points = B+
- 254-245 points = B
- 244-235 points = B-
- 234-225 points = C+
- 224-215 points = C
- 214-205 points = C-
- 204-185 points = D
- Below 184 points = F

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

This is quite a large course, and taking attendance or grading participation in class discussions is not practical. This does not, however, provide you with an invitation to not attend, not prepare, and not participate. I expect that you will come to class having completed the day's reading assignment, and that you will be prepared to: 1) ask questions about material you have not understood or want clarified, and 2) participate in the discussions that we will often engage in as a way of furthering our collective understanding.

But why? Politics is, by its very nature, a subject that requires participation and engagement with the ideas and criticisms of others. In taking this course, I assume that your interest in politics is

not private, but comes from at least some desire to engage with other members of society in discussions about important events and issues, and from at least some desire to participate in making public policy (either by voting or by other, more active means). Preparing to do these things means practicing them. Puzzling through your assigned readings (and some, but not all, will be quite difficult), taking notes, thinking about what makes sense or doesn't (and why) and what you agree or disagree with (and why) are all meant to help you get more out of lecture and discussions. They are also skills that will help you to make sense of, engage with, and discuss issues beyond the scope of this course. But if you require additional incentives, I have constructed a series of assignments that I hope will encourage you to prepare in advance. Also, and I do hope this goes without saying, please be respectful of me and everyone else in class, and turn off your cell phones, don't check your email or surf the web during class, and try to stay awake.

Make-Up Exams and Late Work

If you need to miss an exam for any legitimate reason (official school-related travel and illness or injury being the most common) and inform me in advance, I will prepare a make-up exam, in a format of my choice to be administered in a time and place of my choice. If you miss an exam for any other reason without contacting me in advance of the exam time (slept in, family vacation, or got lost en route, for example), barring extraordinary circumstances, you will receive zero credit. You must take the final exam. The date of the final is fixed in advance, and no early or late exams will be offered, barring truly exceptional (and health-related) circumstances. The same is generally true of late work. If I am not notified in advance of the due date that the work will be late (along with a reasonable excuse), I will not accept it, except in extraordinary circumstances. Work that is accepted late will be penalized 10% per day, again unless there are extraordinary circumstances. If you discover that it will not be possible to turn in an assignment on-time, it behooves you to contact me as early as possible to discuss your options.

What if I'm Not Happy with My Grade?

Sometimes, your professors make legitimate mistakes in grading exams and papers—often due to errors in totaling up points. If you should catch such an error, please bring it to my attention, and I'll fix it immediately. Sometimes, however, students are concerned that they have not received as much credit as they should have for an answer or an essay. In recognition that the grading process is often opaque and difficult to understand, I will happily provide additional feedback during office hours about what I expect and how an answer might be improved. If you are still not satisfied that you have been graded fairly, I ask that you come to my office hours (not over e-mail) with a request in writing for me to re-grade your assignment or test, containing an explanation of exactly what you believe deserve a second look, and why. Only then will I re-grade an answer, and I will re-grade it from scratch. This means that your grade may go up, but it also may go down or remain the same.

How to Get Help

I will be holding office hours (TBD) weekly, as well as by appointment. I cannot encourage you enough to come to see me early, rather than later, if you are having difficulties following or understanding the material. I am far more likely to be flexible, accommodating, and understanding towards someone who has shown initiative, responsibility, and effort by seeking my help early in the term than towards someone who comes to me three days before an exam and

asks me “Can you explain (broad course concept)?” If you cannot attend my office hours but still wish to meet, please contact me by email, with a number (at least three) of times that you are available. I am also generally available for questions before and after class, and I encourage you to approach me at those times.

I also encourage you to seek out other students in the class with whom you may form study groups. The kind of material we’ll be covering in this course isn’t (with a few exceptions) particularly amenable to flashcard, memorizing-type studying. Rather, it’s often best engaged as it would be in the “real world”—by reading about the issue, and then discussing it with friends. Working out how to explain your views and defend your arguments in less stressful situations will undoubtedly help you to prepare for the essay portions of the exams, and will also help you to organize your thoughts and ideas for your memos. I also encourage you to show each other and comment on each other’s memos as you prepare your initial drafts.

Plagiarism, Academic Honesty, and Disability Accommodation

In all cases, my policies on these issues follow Ohio University directives. Per the official OU language for faculty on Academic misconduct:

Academic integrity and honesty are basic values of Ohio University. Students are expected to follow standards of academic integrity and honesty. Academic misconduct is a violation of the Ohio University Student Code of Conduct subject to a maximum sanction of disciplinary suspension or expulsion as well as a grade penalty in the course. Please see the [Student Code of Conduct](#) for more information.

Students who require disability accommodations in test-taking (or other matters) are welcome to meet with me privately, so that you may provide me with your Letter of Notification (specifying the accommodations for which you are eligible), and so we may discuss how we will implement them. If you are not yet registered as a student with a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 740-593-2620 or visit the office in 348 Baker University Center. Space and proctoring services are scarce resources, and I cannot schedule a separate room or an exam proctor on short notice. It is your responsibility to contact me early in the quarter so that I may make the necessary arrangements.

I take plagiarism and academic honesty quite seriously. Students caught cheating on exams (copying from other students or using electronic devices to find answers) **will automatically fail said exam**, with no ability to "make-up" or "re-do" it.¹

Plagiarism is a more complicated topic, as students in this course will have varying degrees of knowledge about how to avoid plagiarism and how to use proper citation techniques. Following our class workshop on memo writing (which will include a formal discussion of plagiarism and how to avoid it), policy memos found to contain plagiarism **will automatically receive a failing**

¹ Students are hereby notified that they are entitled to appeal any academic sanctions as a result of plagiarism or academic misconduct through the official grade appeals process. Students are also hereby informed that University Judiciaries may impose additional sanctions above and beyond those applied by your instructor.

grade that applies to the WHOLE GROUP (just as in the lease agreement to an apartment, all group members are jointly and severally liable for the damages caused by any individual member). This provides a strong incentive for all group members to review and comment on each other's writing and research (which is necessary for effective collaborative writing, in any case). Students who have concerns that a group member is engaging in plagiarism should bring their concerns to me before they turn in their memo.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you hand out a “study guide” before the exams? Are there review sessions?

- To the first: No, I do not. Part of learning to be an effective student is figuring out what to study, and preparing your own study materials to suit your particular needs and the course content. If, after you have prepared your own study guide, you would like to meet with me during my office hours to look over it and make suggestions, I would be happy to do so. Also, bear in mind my suggestion about studying in groups. To the second: I will generally leave a portion of our class time during the session before an exam for questions about the material. But I do not offer “reviews,” in which I re-hash the material for you. This policy is meant to encourage you to begin preparing for exams early enough to know what you need help with before the last minute.

I missed class. Did I miss anything important? Can I have notes?

- If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend class, you should assume you missed something important (I will try as best I can to make every class meeting relevant both to your intellectual development and to the material to be covered on exams). You will need to find a classmate to copy notes from. My notes are designed to aid me in teaching, and will not be of much use for other ends (including studying for my tests). I do not distribute them to students. If, after procuring notes and reviewing them alongside your reading notes, you have questions, come see me in my office hours.

I'm unhappy with the grade I have received on an exam. What can I do? Is there extra credit?

- There is no extra credit in this course. As I suggest above (What if I'm Not Happy with My Grade?), if you are not sure why you have not received an expected or hoped-for grade, your best bet is to come chat with me about it. I want you all to do well in this course. But mastering this material requires a different approach to studying than many of you are accustomed to. Rather than memorizing terms and definitions, you are expected to master abstract ideas, and to apply them to new information to make your own arguments. Learning these skills will help you go far after college, but if you are struggling now, please consider my suggestions for group study, and please come see me as soon as possible after the first exam. I am happy to work with you by looking at your notes, discussing your study strategies, and finding new ways to communicate the material, but you must seek me out in order to get help.

I have a question about the material, or about what will be on the exam, or about some other issue. Who can I get in touch with you? Will you answer my e-mail right away?

- I will generally answer student e-mails the day I receive them, if I receive them before 6 PM. After that, I'll probably be responding the next day. This means that if you anticipate

“last-minute” questions, please begin your studying early enough to ensure I can get back to you. Also, time does not generally permit me to answer long, complicated questions about course material over email. If you anticipate that the response you need will take more than two or three sentences, please come to office hours or make an appointment to see me. You’ll get a better, more comprehensive question that way. Bear in mind that the earlier you begin preparing for exams and due dates, the easier it will be for me to answer your questions.

Course Schedule (By Session)

Prologue: Thinking like a Social Scientist, Thinking like a Good Global Citizen

- **Tuesday, September 6: Introduction**

Introduction to the course, review of the syllabus, initial lecture and discussion

- **Thursday, September 8: How Social Scientists Study and Discuss Politics**

Reading: Larry Bartels (2005), "[Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind](#)," *Perspectives on Politics*, 3:1, pp. 15-31

Course Module 1: The Great Recession: Politics and the Economy

- **Tuesday, September 13: The Financial Crisis in America, Part 1—The Housing Bubble and the Mortgage Crisis**

Listening: This American Life Podcast: [The Giant Pile of Money](#) (Free to stream on their website, \$0.99 to download)

Reading: Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short* (New York: W.W. Norton) pp. xiii-60 (Preface-Chapter 2)

- **Thursday, September 15: The Financial Crisis in America, Part 2—Mortgage-Backed Securities, CDOs, and Derivatives (I)**

Reading: Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short* (New York: W.W. Norton) pp. 61-135 (Chapter 3-Chapter 5)

Recommended Reading: Anna Katherine Barnett-Hart (2009), "[The Story of the CDO Market Meltdown: An Empirical Analysis](#)," Harvard Undergraduate Thesis, pp. 3-33

- **Tuesday, September 20: The Financial Crisis in America, Part 2—How Wall Street Did Business**

Reading: Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short* (New York: W.W. Norton) pp. 136-199 (Chapter 6-Chapter 8)

Jesse Eisinger and Jake Bernstein (April 9, 2010), "[The Magnetar Trade: How One Hedge Fund Helped Keep the Bubble Going](#)" *ProPublica*

- **Thursday, September 22: The Financial Crisis in America, Part 3—The Crash (and what to do?)**

Listening: This American Life Podcast: [Bad Banks](#) (Free to stream on their website, \$0.99 to download)

Reading: Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short* (New York: W.W. Norton) pp. 200-264 (Chapter 9-Epilogue)

Analytic Interlude (I)

- **Tuesday, September 27: Writing Policy Memos**

Please look at the "Sample Memo," posted on this website (From "Cigar Aficionado" Magazine), in advance of our meeting.

Reading: Keith Hjortshoj (2001), [Transition to College Writing](#) (Bedford/St. Martin's Press), pp. 172-84

- **Thursday, September 29: No Class, Group Meetings**

Course Module 1: The Great Recession: Politics and the Economy (Continued)

- **Tuesday, October 4: Capitalism and Democracy, or What's the Role of a Democratic Government in a Capitalist Economy?**

Reading: Milton Friedman (1962), *Capitalism and Freedom*, (University of Chicago Press), Chapter One, "The Relation Between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom," pp. 7-21

Charles Lindblom (1982), "[The Market as Prison](#)," *Journal of Politics*, 44:2, pp. 324-36

Elizabeth Warren (2007), "[Unsafe at Any Rate](#)," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Issue #5

- **Thursday, October 6: Inequality and Capitalism in American Democracy (I)**

Reading: Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson (2010), "[Winner Take All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States](#)," *Politics & Society*, 38:2, pp. 152-204

- **Tuesday, October 11: Inequality and Capitalism in American Democracy (II)**

Reading: Will Wilkinson (2009), "[Thinking Clearly About Economic Policy](#)," *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* # 640

Analytic Interlude (II)

- **Thursday, October 13: Exam I**

Course Module 2: Democracy and Development in Dangerous Places: Understanding Contentious Politics in the Global South

- **Tuesday, October 18: The Bottom Billion: Global Inequality and Democracy**

Reading: Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 1-50

- **Thursday, October 20: Barriers to Democratization, Part 1—Ethnic Diversity**

Reading: Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 51-74

Peter Uvin (1999), "[Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence](#)," *Comparative Politics*, 31:3, pp. 253-71

- **Tuesday, October 25: Civil Wars in Theory and Practice--With an Example from the Ivory Coast**

Reading: Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 121-40 and 155-68

- **Thursday, October 27: Ending the Cycle of Violence--Guns, Coups, Peacekeeping, and Development**

Reading: Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 103-120 and 141-54 and 75-102

- **Tuesday, November 1: The Politics of Protest and Democratization--With Examples from the Middle East (Memos Due)**

Reading: Marc Lynch (2011) "[After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State](#)," *Perspectives on Politics*, 9:2, pp. 301-10

Timur Kuran (1991), "[The East European Revolutions of 1989: Is it Surprising We Were Surprised?](#)," *The American Economic Review*, 81:2, pp. 121-5

- **Thursday, November 3: Making Development Happen: The "Big Push" vs. the Market**

Reading: Jeffrey Sachs (2005), "[The Development Challenge](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, 84:2, pp. 78-90

William Easterly (July/Aug 2007), "[The Ideology of Development](#)," *Foreign Policy*

William Easterly (Jan/Feb 2009), "[The Poor Man's Burden](#)," *Foreign Policy*, pp. 77-81

- **Tuesday, November 8: Making Development Happen—Collier's Solution, and Some Conclusions**

Reading: Paul Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 169-234

- **Thursday, November 10: Guest Speaker***

*The Political Science department will be hosting job candidates this fall for a new position in our department. As part of their interview, one of the job candidates will be coming to our class to speak about a current international issue.

Reading: None

Analytic Interlude (III)

- **Thursday, November 17 at 8:00 AM (in our lecture hall): Exam II (Final Memo Revisions Due)**

By University policy, this exam must take place at the time scheduled for the "final exam." As outlined in the course policies, it is your responsibility to be available at this time. No early or make-up exams will be given, except in exceptional (and verifiable) emergency circumstances. Wishing to leave early for break, or the ill-advised purchase of a plane ticket home/for vacation in advance of checking one's schedule does not constitute an "exceptional" circumstance.