

POLS 150: Current World Problems

Call No. 06100

Room: Bentley Hall 233

Time: 1:10-3:00 PM, Mondays and Wednesdays

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 9-11 AM, and by appt.

Learning Objectives

This course is designed to introduce you to three contemporary political controversies. It is designed to begin a conversation about how to sift and winnow the mass of political information we may (or may not) encounter during our daily lives. In particular, the goal of this course 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. I hope to convince you the research conducted by social scientists might help us to achieve this goal. As such, this course is also meant to introduce you to some of the basic theories and approaches of contemporary political scientists to current world problems.

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

Course Format

Because of this course’s large enrollment, our time together will often revolve around a combination of lecture, large group discussions, and small group or individual exercises designed both to explain the course material and to help you to engage with new ideas and information on a personal level. These components will be balanced in different proportions at different times, depending on their suitability with regards to particular material. There will also be a number of films or film excerpts shown in class. You will be accountable for recalling and understanding the ideas and arguments expressed in these films for examination purposes just as you are with material presented in lecture.

On What Will I be Graded?

Students in this course are assessed on their performance on four different types of assignments/exams, listed below. Due dates are listed below and in the course schedule.

- Response papers (two, each worth 5% of your final grade)

- Three Exams, each worth 20% of your final grade (60% of your final grade)
- A Policy Memo of 13-15 pages , prepared by groups of 5-6 students (with a bibliography and in-text citations) (30% of your final grade, can be revised)

Response Papers

Each student will submit two (typed, double-spaced, 10/12 point font) single-page papers that address some or all of the readings for a week of your choice. The goal of a response paper is not to summarize the main points of arguments of an author, but to *respond* to and *evaluate* them. A response paper that receives full credit will provide evidence that the student has considered the author's ideas and information (in the contexts of the author's intended audience and other course materials), and that the student has come to some initial conclusions about whether or not they agree with the author. You may choose any two weeks you like to submit your response papers, but they must be submitted in-class on the Wednesday of the week you have chosen (no late response papers will be accepted, and no email response papers will be accepted), and both must be submitted no later than Wednesday, November 3.

Exam Schedule and Exam Format

The exams for this course are scheduled on October 6, October 27 (both in-class) and on Monday, November 22, at 12:20 p.m. (the regular final exam time and place). Each exam will require you to identify and contextualize 10 key persons, events, and concepts (the "ID" questions) in two or three sentences, and to respond to one (of a possible two) essay questions, making use of material covered in class and in the assigned readings. These exams will place a premium on your ability to synthesize multiple arguments pertaining to the controversies studied in class, and on your ability to develop and articulate your own point of view. **No exams are "cumulative"—each covers a single course module, even the final.** Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately **at the beginning of the semester** (waiting may impair my ability to offer the accommodation you need) to discuss your specific needs **and to provide me with the written notification from Disability Services requesting accommodation.** If you are not yet registered as a student with a documented disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 740-593-2620 in Crewson House.

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, standard memos) memo that describes the problem (including who is affected and why), summarizes the arguments surrounding the issue, and provides recommendations for US governmental action.

More information will follow later, but an A policy memo will almost certainly 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 shall count in the 13-15 page count.

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 and a preliminary list of sources (both of which should be presented in a typed, 1-2 page document, worth 5% of the policy memo grade). The memo is due in class on Monday, November 8. The memos will be handed back the next week, and **groups receiving grades lower than A will have the opportunity to submit revised memos** on the day of the final (November 22) for **up to** one grade’s additional credit (i.e. a C memo can become a B).

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 for me to re-grade your assignment or test **in writing**, 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.¹

Please see the Student Code of Conduct, at http://www.ohio.edu/judiciaries/conduct_policy.cfm for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions

1) *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 me 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.

2) *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.

3) *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.

4) *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?*

¹ <http://www.ohio.edu/judiciaries/academic-misconduct.cfm#info>

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.

Books and other Readings

Required Books

Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* (New York: WW Norton & Company)

Paul Collier (2009), *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York: HarperCollins)

I have placed all the required textbooks on the "Textbook" system (meaning that they should be available for purchase from the local bookseller of your choice. Note that when I say there are "required" texts, I mean only that I have assigned you to read them in their entirety, not that you must purchase them. They are often available used at substantial discounts from on-line retailers. You are also encouraged to find them in libraries, share copies, form anarcho-syndicalist book-trading collectives, or do anything else necessary to ensure you have the texts to read and study from.

The rest of the course readings will be available online through the Blackboard portal for this course or by following the links included in the syllabus.

Course Schedule

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

Wednesday, September 8: Introduction

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

Monday, September 13: Political Engagement, in Theory and Practice

-C. Wright Mills (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*, pp. 3-24

Wednesday, September 15: How Social Scientists Study and Discuss Politics (and why it's relevant to You)

-George Packer (2006), "Knowing the Enemy: Can Social Scientists Redefine the 'War on Terror'?" *The New Yorker*, December 18, 2006

http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/12/18/061218fa_fact2?currentPage=all

- Alistair Smith and Alejandro Quiroz Flores (2010) “Disaster Politics: Why Earthquakes Rock Democracies Less,” *Foreign Affairs* online
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66494/alastair-smith-and-alejandro-quiroz-flores/disaster-politics?page=show>

Course Module 1: The Great Financial Crisis of 2008-????: Politics and the Economy

Monday, September 20: The Financial Crisis in America, Part I—The Housing Bubble and the Mortgage Crisis

- This American Life Podcast: The Giant Pile of Money
<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/355/the-giant-pool-of-money>
(Free to stream on their website, \$0.99 to download)
- Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short*, pp. xiii-103 (Prologue-Chapter 4)

Wednesday, September 22: The Financial Crisis in America, Part II—Mortgage-Backed Securities, Derivatives, and Wall Street

- Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short*, pp. 104-99 (Chapter 5-8)

Monday, September 27: Fixing the Mess—How (and Why) Governments Regulate the Economy (I)

- This American Life Podcast: Bad Banks
<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/375/bad-bank>
(Free to stream on their website, \$0.99 to download)
- Michael Lewis (2010), *The Big Short*, pp. 200-64 (Chapter 9-Epilogue)

Wednesday, September 29: No Class—Group Meetings with Professor Kendhammer

Monday, October 4: Fixing the Mess—How (and Why) Governments Regulate the Economy (II)

- Charles Lindblom (1982), “The Market as Prison,” *Journal of Politics*, 44:2
- Joseph Stiglitz (2009), “Anatomy of a Murder: Who Killed America’s Economy?” *Critical Review*, 21:3
- William Poole (2010), “A Libertarian Perspective on the Financial Crisis and Financial Reform,” *SAIS Review*, 30:1

Wednesday, October 6: Exam 1

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

Monday, October 11: Making Democracy out of Dictatorship

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

Wednesday, October 13: Barriers to Democratization?—Ethnic Diversity and Post-Conflict Resolution

-Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 51-100

Monday, October 18: The Political Economy of Violence

- Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 103-66

Wednesday, October 20: Digging Out of the Hole—Three Theories of Development and Foreign Aid (I)

-Jeffrey Sachs (2005), “The Development Challenge,” *Foreign Affairs*

-William Easterly (2009), “The Poor Man’s Burden,” *Foreign Policy*

Monday, October 25: Digging Out of the Hole—Three Theories of Development and Foreign Aid (II)

- Collier (2009), *War, Guns, and Votes*, pp. 169-227

-Paul Collier “Collier on the Bottom Billion” podcast on “Econlib,”

http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2008/01/collier_on_the.html

(Free to download)

Wednesday, October 27: Exam 2

Course Module 3: The Politics of Climate Change: How Governments Make (or Don’t Make) Policy on Big, International Issues

Monday, November 1: The Science of Climate Change, Politicized (I)

-David Archer (2009), *The Long Thaw: How Humans are Changing the Next 100,000 Years of the Earth’s Climate*, Chapter 1, “The Greenhouse Effect,” pp. 15-29

Wednesday, November 3: The Science of Climate Change, Politicized (II)

-“The *Foreign Policy* Guide to Climate Skeptics,”

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/25/the_fp_guide_to_climate_skeptics

Monday, November 8: The Tragedy of the Commons

-Garrett Hardin (1968), “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science*, vol. 162

-Elinor Ostrom et al (1999), “Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges,” *Science*, vol. 284

Wednesday, November 10: Making Global Policy on Climate Change (I)—Cost-Benefit Analysis and Ethics

-Paul Krugman (2010), “Building a Green Economy,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 10, 2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/11/magazine/11Economy-t.html>

-University of Arizona Podcast: Global Climate Change: Designing Policy Responses,” Paul Portney, Dean of the Eller College of Management and Professor of Economics, University of Arizona
<http://podcasting.arizona.edu/campus?q=node/17> (bottom of the page, free to download or watch in video)

Monday, November 15: Making Global Policy on Climate Change (II)—Negotiating a Deal

-Pew Center on Global Climate Change’s Summary of the Copenhagen Accords (in three parts)

- 1) <http://www.pewclimate.org/docUploads/targets-and-actions-copenhagen-accord-05-24-2010.pdf>
- 2) <http://www.pewclimate.org/docUploads/copenhagen-accord-adding-up-mitigation-pledges.pdf>
- 3) <http://www.pewclimate.org/docUploads/copenhagen-cop15-summary.pdf>

-David Victor and Linda Yueh (2010), “The New Energy Order: Managing Insecurities in the Twenty-first Century,” *Foreign Affairs*

Monday, November 22, at 12:20 PM: *Final Exam*