

# American Politics: Principles, Processes and Powers

PLSC 001  
Fall 2021

TR 4:35PM – 5:50PM  
Forum Bldg. 102

## Instructor

Prof. Michael Nelson  
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Office: Pond Lab 232 and Zoom (link on Canvas)  
Office Hours: Thurs. 10:00AM-12:00PM  
(and by Appointment)

## Teaching Assistants

Arif Memovic  
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Zoom (link on Canvas)  
Thurs. 1:00-3:00PM

Mia Powell  
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Zoom (link on Canvas)  
Wed. 2:00-4:00PM

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Who has a voice in American politics and why are some political actors more influential than others? Do the electoral and policy making processes uphold democratic values? How responsive is the United States government to public wants? How does the media influence citizens' political preferences and behavior? To the untrained observer, American government can often seem confusing, frustrating, mean-spirited, and dominated by self-interested elites. However, politics is a process designed to take one person's preferences and combine them with those of everyone else, enacting policy decisions without the need for violent conflict. Given this goal, what expectations should we have of our political system and how well do we believe it represents the will of the public?

This course examines the American democracy by looking at the dynamic interaction between the founding ideals of the United States government, the institutions established by the Constitution, and the ongoing contest for power within and through those institutions. Students will learn how Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court shape law and public policy; how the electoral process influences the decisions of voters and political parties; and how the media, interest groups, political action committees, and public opinion impact political outcomes.

The course both provides a foundation for further study of politics and equips students with the capacity to act politically on their own behalf and in concert with their communities. Students are empowered to interpret and pursue their interests, rights, and opportunities within the US political system in relation to the values of democratic equality and liberty the system was organized to secure, and to influence the process through which policies that shape their lives in critical ways are made.

## OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to introduce you to political science as a discipline while teaching you the fundamentals of government and politics in the United States. The aim of this class is not to teach you *what* to think about politics nor a venue for you to attempt to convince others of your political views. Rather, the goal of this class is to teach you *how* to think about politics. At the end of this course, you should understand the systematic forces—the rules, structures, and procedures—that structure politics as practiced in the United States. Moreover, you should have the tools to assess critically causal claims made by politicians and journalists, to be a conscientious consumer of polls, and to understand how political parties, the media, and interest groups interact with political institutions to affect policy change in the United States. To these ends, this course is organized around several motivating questions:

- Why does government appear so contentious and unproductive?
- What does the Constitution say about the rights of citizens and role of states?
- How do the institutions of American government share and exercise power?
- What does the American public believe about government and politics?
- What role do parties, interest groups, and the news media play in American politics?

To be successful in this course you will be responsible for meeting the following objectives:

- Attend all classes on time, prepared to actively participate in discussions and activities. This includes bringing your Clicker, ensuring it is working properly, and responding to all questions asked during each period.
- Complete all readings and assignments on time, correctly answering questions about key concepts and theories.
- Demonstrate your ability to define, recall, combine, and distinguish between course concepts and theories on exams and assignments. This includes the ability to explain material, give examples of its use in national politics, and differentiate it from related terms and theories.

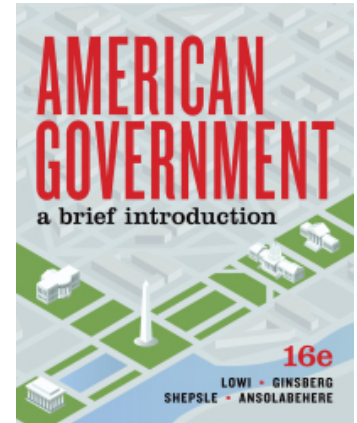
## COURSE MATERIALS

- 1) Ansolabehere, et al. 2021. *American Government: A Brief Introduction*. 16<sup>th</sup> Edition. W.W. Norton. ISBN 9780393538977.
- 2) A series of supplementary readings is available on Canvas.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Be certain to record all your grades and double-check your final semester score to ensure your work was correctly entered. I do not “give” grades. You earn your grade in this course. Exams, quizzes, and in-class participation are your chances to exhibit your knowledge and command of the literature and grow as a student of political science. There are 500 possible points in this course. Your grade in this course will be determined using the following formula:

Exams (3)	300 Points
Chapter Quizzes	100 Points
Participation	100 Points



Exams. There will be three one-hour exams given in this class. The first two will be administered in the Pollock Testing Center and the date and location of the third will be scheduled by the University during finals week. About one week prior to Exam 1 and Exam 2, you will receive an email asking you to register for a time to complete the test. I **strongly** suggest you submit this form as soon as possible as slots fill on a first-come, first-served basis. On the day of the exam, report to the Pollock Building with your Penn State Student ID and a pen or pencil (all other materials will be provided). If you bring a cell phone, smart watch, notes, or any other materials, please ensure they are put away throughout the exam. Failure to follow these procedures may result in disciplinary action.

The material for each exam will be obtained from the readings and in-class lectures. Questions will be written to assess your understanding of the concepts and theories presented as well as your ability to integrate these ideas together and link them to practical politics. Most exam questions will be written as multiple choice, true/false, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions.

Finally, you must complete the third exam during the period established by the University. Do not plan to leave campus before final exams have been announced. There will not be an opportunity to take this test early. You will be awarded a zero if it is missed.

Chapter Quizzes. You will complete short quizzes assessing your understanding of the material covered in our textbook. These questions are designed to ensure you grasp the key points, become familiar with the history of American politics that may not be covered in lecture and realize when you may want to seek help understanding the material. Each chapter quiz will be administered on Canvas and consist of approximately 10 questions drawn from the textbook. You may retake these quizzes as often as you like until the deadline has passed. There are 12 possible quizzes. **I will count your best 10 (out of 12) chapter quizzes toward your final grade.** The deadline for each assignment is 11:59 p.m. EST (midnight) on the date indicated in the course schedule.

Online Participation. This class is quite large, so unfortunately, we cannot have the sort of back-and-forth discussions we would have in a smaller course. However, I strive to create meaningful opportunities for you to engage with the course material and with your peers. Thus, I have assigned students randomly to semester-long discussion groups. You and your group members will have the ability to discuss current events related to each week’s topic and to participate in activities that will help you internalize the concepts. Each student will receive an individual grade, but I set up the small groups to provide a more engaging atmosphere than attempting to discuss the course material than trying to have a live discussion with over 300 other people in a huge room. The activities will be made available Monday morning. Most weeks, you will be asked to make an initial post by Thursday at 11:59PM and to respond to a group member’s post by Sunday at 11:59PM. **I will count your best 10 (out of 13) online activities toward your final grade.**

## EXPECTATIONS/PROCEDURES

RESPECT. In this course, we are all engaged in the endeavor of building a stronger understanding of the American political system. Everyone comes to this course with a different background in our subject and different views of the implications of many of the topics that we discuss. It is important that we all treat each other with the utmost respect.

OFFICE HOURS. Please come. The TAs and I are here to help. If our office hours conflict with another commitment, please e-mail us to find a time that works to meet. I'm serious about this.

EXTENSIONS. Extensions will be granted in only the most severe circumstances. If you foresee the need for an extension, one needs to be requested and granted at least 24 hours before the due date. No one is entitled to an extension; they will be offered only at my discretion.

ATTENDANCE. **It is not necessary to contact us** if you are ill, have a family emergency, or any other reason that causes you to be absent for a particular day.

GRADING SCALE. The course will use the following grading scale:

93-100	A	87-89	B+	77-79	C+
90-92	A-	83-86	B	70-76	C
		80-82	B-	60-69	D

REGARDING GRADES. I do not *give* grades. You *earn* grades. It is essential that you are proactive regarding your performance in this course; *do not wait* until grades are posted and then ask how your grade could be improved. At that point, barring a mathematical error on my part, it cannot be. If, at any point, you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please come to my office hours. I may (or may not) offer extra credit assignments to the entire class during the semester. I am sometimes asked about extra-credit or additional assignments after the final grades have been tallied by students who are unhappy with their grades. I will not offer such assignments to the class or individual students.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. Students with questions about academic integrity should visit <http://www.la.psu.edu/> and then click on "Academic Integrity."

Penn State defines academic integrity as "the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner" ([Senate Policy 49-20](#)). Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without permission from the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students facing allegations of academic misconduct should not drop the course; those who do will be added to the course again and will be expected to complete course work and meet

course deadlines. If the allegations are dismissed, then the drop will be permitted. Students found responsible for academic misconduct often receive academic sanctions, which can be severe, and put themselves at risk for disciplinary sanctions assigned by the University's Office of Student Conduct (see [Senate Policy G-9](#)).

To avoid plagiarism in this course, all of the written work you submit should be your own words, unless you are quoting directly from a source. If so, the quotation should be clearly marked. You should always cite and credit any sources you consult in your writing.

In this course, you may use your notes, textbook, and any other materials (including internet searches) for the online quizzes. For exams, you may not use any resources: the exams are fully “closed book.”

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Student Disability Resources Web site provides [contact information for every Penn State campus](#). For further information, please visit the [Student Disability Resources Web site](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, [participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your [campus’s disability services office](#) will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES. Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients’ cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395  
Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400  
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Educational Equity and Reporting Bias Incidents. State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#). You may also contact one of the following offices:

University Police Services, University Park:	814-863-1111
Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students:	814-865-1773
Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity:	814-865-5906
Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs:	814-865-0909
Affirmative Action Office:	814-863-0471

Call 911 in cases where physical injury has occurred or is imminent.

STUDENT CARE & ADVOCACY OFFICE. College presents many challenges for students, and Penn State maintains an office of Student Care & Advocacy that can point you in the right direction if you are facing any of the following issues:

- Death of an immediate family member
- Family crisis
- Mental health concern
- Self-injurious behavior
- Food insecurity
- Housing insecurity
- Medical emergency and/or hospitalization
- Local natural disaster
- Academic distress
- Unexpected events or challenges

If you have questions, concerns, or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact that office by phone at 814-863-2020 or by email at [StudentCare@psu.edu](mailto:StudentCare@psu.edu). They encourage you to call or e-mail ahead.

EXTENDED ABSENCES. During your enrollment at Penn State, unforeseen challenges may arise. If you ever need to miss an extended amount of class in such a circumstance, please notify your professor so you can determine the best course of action to make up missed work. If your situation rises to a level of difficulty you cannot manage on your own with faculty support, reach out to the Student Care & Advocacy office by phone at [\(814-863-2020\)](tel:814-863-2020) or email them at [StudentCare@psu.edu](mailto:StudentCare@psu.edu). Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

MANDATORY MASKING. Penn State University currently requires everyone to wear a face mask in all university buildings, including classrooms, regardless of vaccination status. ALL STUDENTS MUST wear a mask appropriately (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) while you are indoors on campus. This is to protect your health and safety as well as the health and safety of your classmates, instructor, and the university community. Anyone attending class without a mask will be asked to put one on or leave. I may end class if anyone present refuses to appropriately wear a mask for the duration of class. Students who refuse to wear masks appropriately may face disciplinary action for Code of Conduct violations. If you feel you cannot wear a mask during class, please speak with your advisor about your options for altering your schedule.

## SCHEDULE

Below, you'll find a list of all class meetings, the topic we'll discuss, the reading assignment, and some questions to consider as you prepare for class and as you study for exams. You should complete the reading assignment before you come to class and bring any questions that you have with you to our class meetings. If deviations from this schedule are necessary, they will be announced in class.

## Part I: Principles

### Week 1

Aug. 24: Introduction to the Course

*What does government do in America? What are the conclusions you will draw from this class? What do you need to do to be successful in this class?*

- No readings

Aug. 26: Understanding Politics: Creating a Language to Understand What's Happening

*What is politics and why is it necessary? Why are institutions important to the operation of American government? Why is it difficult for groups to reach agreement (i.e. collective action problems)? How can collective action problems be overcome?*

- LGSA, Chapter 1

### Week 2

Aug. 31: The Constitution: Developing a Governing Document

*How does Home Rule influence the Articles of Confederation? How do the Articles influence the Constitution? Who wrote the Constitution and what motivated their decisions?*

- LGSA, Chapter 2, Pages 22-32
- Skim:
  - The Declaration of Independence [LGSA pg. A2-A5]
  - The Articles of Confederation [LGSA pg. A6-A11]

Sept. 2: The Constitution: What Did the Founders Create?

*What concerned the framers when drafting the Constitution and how did they solve their problems? What type of government did our Founders create? What does the Constitution say and how should it be interpreted?*

- LGSA, Chapter 2, Pages 32-51
- The U.S. Constitution [LGSA pg. A12-A30]
- **Chapter 1 Quiz Due**

### Week 3

Sept. 7: The Constitution: Ratification and The Problem of Factions

*How did the Federalists convince the states to ratify the Constitution? What were the major arguments for and against ratification? Is the Constitution still relevant today?*

- Federalist #10 & #51 [LGSA pg. A31-A38]
- Brutus, Anti-Federalist Paper #1 (October 18, 1787).

Sept. 9: Dividing Power: The Separation of Powers

*What is the separation of powers and why is it present in the United States? How is power divided among the three branches of government? How has the separation of powers changed over time?*

- LGSA, Chapter 3, Pages 71-78
- **Chapter 2 Quiz Due**

Week 4

Sept. 14: Dividing Power: Federalism

*What is federalism and why is it present in the United States? How is power divided between state and federal governments? How has federalism changed over time? Can federalism make national movements easier?*

- LGSA, Chapter 3, Pages 52-71
- Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden. 2020. "[Coronavirus policies spread quickly across the U.S. Are cities and states learning — or just copying?](#)," *The Monkey Cage* April 16.
- Sara Wallace Goodman. 2020. "[Should U.S. states be free to close their borders to other U.S. citizens?](#)," *The Monkey Cage* April 3.

Sept. 16: Political Parties: Why Parties?

*What are political parties? What role do they play in the operation of government and politics? Are parties necessary in American politics?*

- LGSA, Chapter 11, Pages 344-367
- **Chapter 3 Quiz Due**

Week 5

Sept. 21: Political Parties: America's Evolving Party System

*Why does the US have a two-party system? How have the parties and their platforms changed over time?*

- LGSA, Chapter 11, Pages 367-380

Sept 23: Political Parties: Partisan Polarization

- Finkel et al. 2020. "Political Sectarianism in America." *Science* 370 (6516): 533-536.
- **Chapter 11 Quiz Due**
- **Extra Credit Assignment 1 Due**

Week 6

Sept. 28: **Exam 1 (Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 11)**

**No class meeting today. Take exam in Pollock Testing Center.**

Sept. 30: Congress: Who Serves in Congress? What do Members of Congress Do?

*What are the requirements for serving in Congress? What is the process by which members of Congress are selected? Is Congress representative?*

- Mayhew, David. 1974. Selection from *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.
- Fenno, Richard. 1978. Selection from *Home Style*.
- Binder, Sarah. 2021. "[Why is Manchin Such a Thorn in the Democratic Party's Side? Let Us Count the Reasons.](#)" *The Monkey Cage* 10 Jun.

## Part II: Powers

Week 7

Oct. 5: Congress: Organization & Rules

*How does the House operate differently from the Senate? What is the importance of seniority and being in the majority? Why does Congress utilize committees and how do they operate? How does a bill become law?*

- LGSA, Chapter 5



Oct. 7: Congress: Operation & Dysfunction

*How do members of Congress determine how to vote on bills? Why doesn't Congress seem to get much done?*

- Lee, Frances. Excerpt from *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign*
- Sarah A. Binder, "Legislating in Polarized Times."
- **Chapter 5 Quiz Due**

### Week 8

Oct. 12: Presidency: Presidential Powers

*How is the executive branch designed? How has the role of the president changed over time? How are presidents elected?*

- LGSA, Chapter 6

Oct. 14: Presidency: Presidential Success

*What are the powers of the president? How have presidents varied in their approach to the office? How influential (powerful) are presidents?*

- Edsall, Thomas B. 2019. "The Fight Over How Trump Fits in With the Other 44 Presidents." *New York Times* 15 May. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/opinion/trump-history-presidents.html>
- Barnett, Andrew and Maureen Linke. 2021. "Biden's First 100 Days: Covid-19 Relief Package, Executive Orders, and Appointments." *Wall Street Journal* April 29.
- **Chapter 6 Quiz Due**

### Week 9

Oct. 19: Federal Judiciary: Jurisdiction and Process

*How are federal courts different from state courts? How are criminal cases different from civil cases? Who are the chief actors in the federal court system and what is their purpose?*

- LGSA, Chapter 8

Oct. 21: Federal Judiciary: U.S. Supreme Court Procedure

*What is the process whereby a case arrives at the Supreme Court? How has the role and importance of the Supreme Court changed over time?*

- Epstein, Lee and Thomas Walker. "Understanding the U.S. Supreme Court." Ch. 1 in *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Pg. 8-22
- Liptak, Adam. 2021. "[A Supreme Court Term Marked by a Conservative Majority in Flux](#)." *New York Times* 2 Jul.
- **Chapter 8 Quiz Due**

### Week 10

Oct. 26: The Bureaucracy: A "Deep State"?

*What is a principal-agent problem? How is the executive branch organized? Who controls the bureaucracy?*

- LGSA, Chapter 7

Oct. 28: Public Opinion: What is the Importance of Public Opinion?

*How do people form their political beliefs? What explains variation in the public's attitudes toward politics? Why is public opinion important to understand?*

- LGSA, Chapter 9, Pages 262-285
- **Chapter 7 Quiz Due**
- **Extra Credit Assignment 2 Due**

## **Part III: Processes**

### Week 11

Nov. 2: **Exam 2 (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8)**

**No class meeting today. Take exam in Pollock Testing Center.**

Nov. 4: Public Opinion: Measuring Public Opinion

*Should we trust surveys? How can we tell a good survey from a bad survey?*

- Schuman, Howard. 2002. "Sense and Nonsense about Surveys." *Contexts* Summer 2002, 40-47.

- Pew Research Center. 2020. “Election 2020 Polling Field Guide.”

### Week 12

Nov. 9: The Media: How does the Media Matter?

*How do Americans learn about politics? What affects which events get covered by the media? What is the role of the media in American government and politics?*

- LGSA, Chapter 9, Pages 285-296

Nov. 11: Voting, Campaigns, & Elections: Electoral Institutions

*Who is allowed to vote and why do we choose our leaders in elections? Why do some people turn out and vote while others stay home? How do campaigns attempt to gain support?*

- LGSA, Chapter 10, Pages 298-317
- **Chapter 9 Quiz Due**

### Week 13

Nov. 16: Voting, Campaigns, & Elections: Voting Behavior

*How do voters decide which candidate to support? What is the impact of campaign donations on elections? Do campaigns matter?*

- LGSA, Chapter 10, Pages 317-341
- Igielnik, Ruth, Scott Keeter, and Hannah Hartig. 2021. *Behind Biden’s 2020 Victory*. Pew Research Center.

Nov. 18: Interest Groups: Tactics and Influence

*What tactics do interest groups use to advance their agendas? What are PACs and what is their role in American politics? How do PACs determine who to support? Do interest groups and PACs have too much influence?*

- LGSA, Chapter 12
- **Chapter 10 Quiz Due**

Nov. 23 & 25: No Class – Thanksgiving Break

### Week 14

Nov. 30: Civil Liberties: Finding and Defining the Rights of Citizens

*What are civil liberties and where are they found? How do judges interpret the Constitution? What rights are found in the 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> Amendments? What are the controversies that surround these amendments?*

- LGSA, Chapter 4, Pages 80-102
- **Chapter 12 Quiz Due**

Dec. 2: Civil Rights: Creating a More Equal Nation

*Understanding civil rights through the African American experience – integration, the courts, and Congress. What lessons can we learn from the African American experience? How have other groups gained civil rights? What policy options are available to lawmakers attempting to create greater equality?*

- LGSA, Chapter 4, Pages 102-126
- **Chapter 4 Quiz Due**

### Week 15

Dec. 7: Reforming American Government

- Rosen, Jeffrey. 2020. “What if We Could Rewrite the Constitution Today?” *The Atlantic* 8 Dec. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/12/what-if-we-could-rewrite-constitution/617304/>
- Also read the introductions to the “Libertarian,” “Conservative,” and “Progressive” constitutions linked in the article and available online here: <https://constitutioncenter.org/debate/special-projects/constitution-drafting-project>.
- Skim the three proposed constitutions, comparing and contrasting their features.

Dec. 9: Reforming American Government

- Reading TBD

Last Revised: August 17, 2021



- **Extra Credit Assignment 3 Due**

Finals Week

**Dec. 13-17: Exam 3** (Chapters 4, 9, 10, and 12)

Date, time, and location to be scheduled by the University

## Extra Credit: “Explainer” Assignment<sup>1</sup>

I hope this class helps you to understand the American political system. Politics is important to our daily lives, and people talk about politics with their friends and family often. Prior to each exam, you will have the opportunity to pick a concept, framework, or idea that you’ve learned about and craft an “explainer” that could help someone who hasn’t taken this class understand the concept. Each “explainer” is worth up to 10 extra credit points.

By “explainer” I simply mean that you need to create some product (other than a formal essay) that teaches an important concept from our class to someone who hasn’t been in the class. Be creative! You could write a blog post, record a podcast, write a poem, make a video (or TikTok), design a meme, or anything else that you think would be a useful medium to explain a concept to a friend or family member.

Your assignment must be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. EST on the days indicated in the course schedule; no late assignments will be accepted. You can submit your “explainer” at any point prior to the due date. If you have questions about this assignment, you are welcome to send us an email or stop by office hours.

### What concepts can I use?

You must choose a concept, topic, or idea that has been discussed in class or in the assigned readings and that you will be tested on during the next upcoming exam. You should choose only one topic. For example, you might choose to explain the Electoral College for “Explainer” #1. Here are the topics that can be covered for each assignment:

- Explainer 1: The logic of American politics, the Constitution, federalism, the separation of powers, or political parties
- Explainer 2: Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, or the federal judiciary
- Explainer 3: Public opinion, voting, campaigns and elections, interest groups, the news media, civil rights, or civil liberties

### How will I be graded?

Each explainer is worth up to 10 extra credit points. You can earn up to 2 points for each of the following five items:

- The explainer demonstrates a thorough understanding of the concept.
- The explainer articulates why the concept is important
- The explainer uses language that is understandable by people who haven’t taken a political science class in college.
- The project demonstrates a significant amount of effort.
- The project demonstrates thoughtfulness and creativity.

You are welcome to submit a short (1-2 page) reflection along with your assignment to provide any additional detail you deem necessary to help us understand your project.

I hope to share some of these with the class (and perhaps with future PLSC 001 students). If you would *not* like me to share your project with the class, please indicate that when you submit the assignment to Canvas.

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<sup>1</sup> This assignment is adapted from one used by Jamilia Mischner and Hakeem Jefferson.  
Last Revised: August 17, 2021

### Rubric for Extra Credit Assignments

	<b>2 Points</b>	<b>1 Point</b>	<b>0 Points</b>
<b>Thorough understanding of the concept</b>	The concept is explained clearly and correctly.	There are minor inaccuracies in discussing the concept.	There are major inaccuracies in discussing the concept and/or the concept is not from the current unit.
<b>Articulates Importance</b>	The explainer demonstrates why the concept is important for non-experts to care about.	There is little effort to explain why the concept is important for non-experts to care about.	There is no effort to explain why the concept is important for non-experts to care about.
<b>Clear language</b>	The concept is explained in clear and jargon-free language.	There may be some reliance on jargon and/or the explanation of the concept is not clear.	The product relies heavily on jargon and/or is hard to follow.
<b>Effort</b>	The product looks professional and has correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling (as applicable).	The product is not particularly polished and/or suffers from several mechanical errors.	The product is not presented professionally and/or has numerous errors that make it difficult to understand.
<b>Thoughtfulness and Creativity</b>	The product is enticing, appealing and interesting to non-experts. It is apparent that a great deal of thought went into the assignment.	The product is somewhat creative but lacks a “hook” that would draw in non-experts and help them to learn about politics.	The product’s form or design would not appeal to non-experts.