

POL 51 American Government and Politics

Kingsborough Community College

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Office Hours: Monday 2:00-3:00pm & by appointment.

I. The Course

Welcome to American Government! This course is designed to provide an introduction to the major institutions of American federal government as well as the most important political processes and theories of political science more generally. We will use this knowledge to consider some of the major controversies, criticisms, and suggestions for reform in American politics. The learning objective for this class is to be able to explain the primary organs and functioning of the US government, and to be able to identify the mechanisms for change in policymaking. We've gone online due to COVID-19, so we're all going to do the best we can and get through this together. We will be meeting in our groups each week, and you are expected to check in with your group members each week in addition to that one weekly meeting. This course takes an open pedagogy approach to teaching, and will use modified self-grading for all written assessments.

II. Adventures

These are the learning activities available to you this semester. You do not have to do all of them! Pick 100 points (or so) worth of things you'd like to do, then plan out how and when you'll do them; write this up as your first blog post, which you'll revisit at the middle and end of the course. Blogging and Group Meetings are mandatory, but the rest is up to you.

Adventures	Due Date/How to Submit	Points	Your Score
Site & Weekly Blog	Write 2 entries each week on your blog. Final post & Grade Reflection due Dec 17	20	
Rewrite a Textbook Chapter	Group or Individual Proposal must be emailed to me by November 15. Final Version Due December 17.	20	
What's Your Problem	by December 17- on your site	20	
Book Review	Get book approved by November 15. Final review due by December 17- on your site	20	
Online Open Book Midterm	Take from October 19-25	20	
Online Open Book Final Exam	Take from Dec 15-17	20	
Weekly Group Meetings		15	
Meme	by October 11- on your site	15	

Commented [1]: Makes open pedagogy approach explicit

Commented [2]: Students choosing their own learning path- for intrinsic motivation and agency

Commented [4]: Frequent low-stakes writing helps students develop as writers, while building reflection on learning into the course.

Commented [3]: Transferable skill of creating a website on the Commons, students get to control their own IP

Commented [5]: Students as knowledge creators, not just passive receivers.

Commented [6]: Authentic Assignment- a letter instead of a research paper.

Commented [7]: Breaking the large class into groups to promote community within the class and make synchronous meetings small enough to be worth students' time.

Commented [8]: Creative assignments give students a chance to work with material. The memes & essays students write become a study guide for the midterm exam, which gives students an authentic audience.

Film Review	by December 17- on your site	10	
Design Your Own Assignment - photo essay, video, song, dance, sculpture, anything else	Email me with project proposal for approval first; proposals submitted after November 15 are unlikely to be approved. Final project must be submitted by December 17 on your site.	10	
Introduction Slide	by September 20	5	
Political Participation	by December 17- on your site or email	5	
Chapter Infographic	by end of each week, on your site & licensed to share with class	5	
Final Slide	by December 7- add your slide to linked slideshow	5	

Commented [9]: Built in option for students who wish to do something different, which lets students explore the material in ways that are interesting to them.

Commented [10]: Creating community by letting students introduce themselves.

Commented [11]: Idea adapted/stolen from Dr. Terri Towner's excellent APSA Educate resource.

1. Site & Weekly Blog (20 Points): Reflecting on learning is an essential part of learning, so each week, you'll write reflections in the form of blog posts. Please **write 2 blog posts each week**- 1 that relates to the reading (could be the best and worst things you learned in the reading, most and least favorite, etc or anything else), and one additional one- could be about your learning process or journey, or something related to the class topic that's going on in the world. Aim for for **2-3 well-written (spell-checked and proof-read!) paragraphs for each post.** You must post your blogs to a site you create (on the CUNY Academic Commons or elsewhere). We'll work through this during our first class meeting.

2. Weekly Group Meetings (15 points): To build community in our class, students will be assigned to a group for the semester. These are your people! Give your group a name. Figure out with them how you wish to communicate with each other- email, text, Slack, telephone- whatever you decide collectively. When you have a question about the class, reach out to your group members first. This semester may be challenging, so use the group structure to support each other, and let me know how I can best support you. I will meet online with 2 groups per class day during our assigned class time (i.e, your group will be assigned to Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday- you only attend your group's assigned day- use the class time on the other days to do your work for this class!). I'll plan the first 2 weeks, then the two groups will alternate between

3. Rewrite a Textbook Chapter (20 Points): Don't like our assigned readings? Write better ones! Alone or as part of a group, rewrite a textbook chapter. Rewritten chapters must be appropriate for an introductory level college class and licensed for openly sharing. Group or Individual Proposal must be emailed to me no later than November 15. Final Version due by December 17.

4. What's Your Problem (20 Points) Throughout the semester, we will work on identifying problems and possible solutions in American Government. To that end, each student will identify and research a pressing problem in American Government about which they feel strongly. They will then write a letter to one member of the federal government explaining the problem and proposing a solution. The final letter is due on your site by December 17.

Commented [12]: Specific requirements clearly spelled out, which helps students understand what is expected, so they can do it and grade themselves accordingly.

5. Book Review (20 Points): read a recent (published in the last ten years) scholarly book written by an academic and write an academic book review. Review should be 1-2 pages and should include both a summary of the contents of the book as well as your opinion and critique of the book. You can find information on how to write an academic book review, including a useful “classic book review structure” list [here](#). **Students must get their chosen book approved by me before November 15** in order to choose this adventure, and reviews must be submitted on your site by December 17. I highly recommend [The New Jim Crow](#) or [Twitter and Tear Gas](#) (the latter has a free, Creative Commons-licensed version available online [here](#))

6. Midterm and Final Examinations (20 points each) There will be two online examinations for this course- a **midterm from October 19-25** and a **final exam from December 15-17**. The exams will be open book and open note, with unlimited time during the testing period; you will be allowed to attempt the exam as many times as you like while it is open, and only the highest grade will be counted into your points total.

7. Meme Assignment (15 Points) Working with academic content in unexpected and creative ways is shown to create deeper learning, so each student will create a meme that explains or illustrates part of American government, and write a short essay explaining their meme, which will be due on **October 11**.

8. Film Review (10 points) view a recently produced **feature-length documentary film** (on Netflix/Hulu/iTunes/Roku/YouTubeetc- do NOT go to the movies!) and write a review. The film you select must be a feature-length (not a short or a television episode or series) and must be a documentary, not a fictionalized film based on a real event. Review should be 1-2 pages, and include a summary of the film, with how you connect this film to our class. How does the film expand or deepen your knowledge of course topics? You can read more about writing a film review [here](#).

9. Design Your Own Assignment (10 points): students who have an idea for an assignment that would further their learning may design their own assignment. Some ideas include: a photo essay, video, song, Tik-Tok series, sculpture, or anything else. Students wishing to choose this adventure must initiate discussion with me no later than November 15. Final project due no later than December 17.

10. Introduction Slide (5 points): In an online class, it can be hard to get to know each other. During the first week of class, add one slide about yourself to our Meet the Class slideshow here: ([link](#)). On your slide, please include the name you prefer to be called, some things about yourself you'd like the class to know, and an image you'd like us to associate with you (could be a picture of yourself, a pet, a bitmoji, a piece of art, or an avatar- whatever you'd like us to think of you as).

11. Political Participation (5 Points) To further activate your learning from this class, you need to do something with it! Credit will only be given for socially distant COVID-19-safe participation! Examples include, but are not limited to: Call/email one of your representatives in federal, state, or city government, phone or textbank for a candidate or cause you care about, even help complete the US Census for your household- there are lots of ways to participate politically that you can do from home. Do something, then write 2-3 paragraphs explaining what you did, how it connects to the class topics, and what you learned from the experience. Students who have safety or other concerns about this assignment are encouraged to email me or discuss it with me in office hours. Reflections can be posted to your site or emailed to me.

12. Chapter Infographic (5 points): Make an infographic of the chapter we are covering this week. Post it to your blog, and license it for sharing. Your infographic must cite the sources you have used and explain the chapter, but the rest is up to you. You may use any program you like ([Piktochart](#), [Canva](#), and [Venngage](#) all have free options, or you can use Powerpoint/Google Slides/Word/Docs- whatever you choose). You can learn how to make an infographic [here](#) and read what makes a great infographic [here](#). Remember to write and submit a self-grading assessment.

13. Final Slide: (5 points) To really cement our learning, we're going to make a collaborative powerpoint slideshow of our individual favorite/most important pieces. Before the last day of class (by **11:59pm December 7** at the latest) please add a single slide to the class collaborative study guide. Your slide should cover one thing you learned during the semester that you'd like to discuss with the class. **Make sure your slide includes your name, at least one quote from assigned readings, one piece of quantitative data you think is relevant, and at least one visual (data visualization, graph, map, photo, etc), all of which should be properly cited in the slide.** Please write a final reflection blog post, explaining your slide and anything else you wish to discuss about your learning this semester. Also, there is **NO REPEATING ANYONE ELSE'S SLIDE TOPIC/ELEMENTS-** so there is an incentive to get your slide in sooner rather than later.

III. The Grading All of the learning activities in this class, except the exams, are self-graded. That means, along with each assignment, you will give yourself a grade (out of the points possible for the assignment), and write an explanation of why you assigned that grade to yourself. This explanation must include an analysis of how successful you have been in fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. If I agree with your analysis, that's the grade you'll get. I do reserve the right to correct grades that do not seem accurate, so make sure your self-grading is rigorous and reflective of each adventure's requirements (not just effort put in). Add up all of the points you have earned and convert them to a letter grade using simple math and the letter grade allocation from the student handbook, reprinted below:

97-100 = A+	77-79 = C+
93-96 = A	73-76 = C
90-92 = A-	70-72 = C-
87-89 = B+	66-69 = D
83-86 = B	60-65 = F
80-82 = B-	

IV. Course Policies

1. Access-Ability Services <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/access-ability/homepage.html> It is the policy of Kingsborough Community College and of this instructor to provide all reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you require accommodations for any disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other), or have any questions about accommodations, whether you need them, or how to get them, please contact the Kingsborough Community College Access-Ability Services (AAS) at 718-368-5145 or aas@kbcc.cuny.edu. Please let me know the accommodations needed as soon as possible so I can make any necessary changes.

2. Commons, Blackboard, & Email: A copy of the syllabus and all assignments and course documents will be posted to our class site on the CUNY Academic Commons; other information (links to articles of interest or additional readings) may be posted as well. You will need a CUNY email address to work on the commons, so please get it sorted out as soon as possible. You can follow the instructions to get into your KCC email here: <https://inside.kingsborough.edu/kccemail/fssemail.php> and let me know if you have any problems.

3. Courtesy: Students must treat each other with respect. **All opinions must be backed up by evidence from reputable academic sources.** Some of the topics we will cover may be traumatic for different students because of their past experiences. If you anticipate or are experiencing any such difficulties with course materials or assignments, please email me as soon as possible so an alternative assignment can be arranged.

Commented [13]: Explanation of Modified Ungrading/Self-Grading Policy lets students know clearly how their grade will be calculated- by them!

Commented [14]: ADA Compliance information and link to relevant campus office.

4. Preferred Gender Pronoun and Name: I affirm all forms of gender expressions and identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to inform me on your preferred gender pronoun or if you do not have a pronoun. The gender-neutral bathrooms are located in the following places on campus: A117, A119, L303, L504, M436, T4 154, T8 108B, V211, and V212. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. For more information, please visit <https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2017/02/24/protecting-the-rights-of-transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-students/>

5. Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is of the utmost importance- this is your learning, and you must be responsible for it. I am here to help in any way I can. Cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be punished to the fullest extent possible, including academic and disciplinary sanctions (i.e. failure or suspension). This includes, but is not limited to, having other people do your coursework, buying prepackaged or custom answers to papers, tests, or assignments, and working with other students on class projects when not specifically permitted to do so. Keep in mind, if you can find a place to buy a paper/answers on the Internet, your professors probably can find the same place, because we have the Internet too. Please familiarize yourself with the official KBCC policy at https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/studentaffairs/student_conduct/academic_integrity.html

6. Support Services Take advantage of the many, many opportunities for support in your development as a student available at Kingsborough. **All of the offices/services on campus have remote assistance available.** Some offices on campus that may be helpful to you include (but are not limited to):

- **KCC Library:** <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/kcclibrary/Homepage.html>
- **Center for Academic Writing Success**, 718-368-5118, <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/caws/index.html#online>
- **IT Helpdesk:** <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/its/Homepage.html> 718-368-6679 or helpdesk@kbcc.cuny.edu
- **Access Resource Center** (718-368-5411, <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/arc/Homepage.html> - benefits screening, winter coat and clothing closet, resource center, legal and financial consultations
- **Food Pantry-** <http://kbcc.cuny.edu/arc/additional.html> Weekly pantry bag pickup available at front gate. Email or call first for an appointment: arc.kcc@kbcc.cuny.edu
- **The Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation Student Emergency Grant Fund-** <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/admission/EmergencyFund.html> provides financial assistance to KCC students who are currently enrolled, are in good academic standing and are facing short-term financial emergencies (examples: job loss, illness, or death of family member/self, need for glasses or dental work, homelessness or impending homelessness, theft of books/computer, etc).
- **Counseling Center**(718-368-5975 https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/counselingservices/counseling_resource_center.html)
- **Health Services** (718-368-5684 <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/healthservices/about.html>)
- **Women's Center** (718-368-4700 https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/womens_resource_center/Homepage.html)
- More Student Resources are listed here: <https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/studres/home.html#support>

Commented [15]: Resources for academic support listed

Commented [16]: Resources to support basic needs listed

V. Schedule & Readings

The required textbook, Krutz et al (2019). American Government 2e from Openstax. is free and posted on the course website; it is also available [here](#). Make sure you do all of the required reading each week, annotating (electronically, in separate notes, or on your printed copy) as you go, with questions, thoughts, and suggestions. There is a series of Crash Course Videos on YouTube that are quite relevant- the videos are available [here](#). The interactive slides for the entire semester are XXXX; you should work your way through them each week. They are meant to *assist* your comprehension of your reading- *not to replace* your reading or participation.

Commented [17]: Using this OER textbook makes course materials available for all students- it's zero cost and accessible for screen readers. Students who prefer to print it can do so.

Commented [18]: Content available in multiple modalities- text and video; all resources are captioned and compatible with screen-readers for accessibility.

Week 1	Sept 14-20	Introduction	Complete Introduction Slide. Create your commons site & send it to Dr. Brandle to be linked to class site. Review and choose your adventures, then plan out your schedule (sample week and adventures for the semester) and blog it. Decide on group name and means of communication (platform & frequency) with your group.
Week 2	Sept 21-27	The Founding & The Constitution	The Constitution, Chapter 2 , Crash Course Videos 2-5
Week 3	Sept 28-Oct 4	Federalism	Chapter 3 , Crash Course Video 4
Week 4	Oct 5-11	Civil Liberties	Chapter 4 , Crash Course Videos 23-28 . Meme due by October 11.
Week 5	Oct 12-18	Civil Rights	Chapter 5 , Crash Course Videos 29-32
Week 6	Oct 19-25	Midterm Exam & Legislative Branch	Chapter 11 , Crash Course Videos 6-10 . Make sure you have completed the exam by 11:59pm on October 25.
Week 7	Oct 26-Nov 1	The Executive Branch	Chapter 12 , Crash Course Videos 11-14 . Midterm check-in blog post: do a self-assessment of your progress so far-check your first post about what your plans were against how you're doing so far. What is working well and what isn't? What specific changes (if any) do you need to make to ensure successful completion of this course?
Week 8	Nov 2-8	The Judicial Branch	Chapter 13 , Crash Course Videos 19-22
Week 9	Nov 9-15	Voting and Elections	Chapter 7 , Crash Course Videos 36-39 . Last week to get book review, chapter rewrite, or design your own adventure proposals approved.

Week 10	Nov 16-22	Political Parties	Chapter 9 , Crash Course Videos 35 & 40-41
Week 11	Nov 23-29	Domestic Policy	Chapter 16 , Crash Course Video 47 & 49
Week 12	Nov 30-Dec 6	Foreign Policy	Chapter 17 , Crash Course Video 50
Week 13	Dec 7-13	Putting it All Together	Final Slide Due by December 7.
Dec 15-17	Take Final Exam		
Dec 17	Absolute Last Date for all Adventurst to be submitted.		