

POLS XXX: Introduction to United States Government
Political and Civic Engagement Assignment
Fall 2025

The study of American government cannot be restricted to the classroom. A very powerful means by which students can learn about government is to become involved in one of its activities: whether by participating directly in politics or engaging in service in the community. New pedagogical theory argues that experiential learning, in addition to traditional pedagogical approaches, can greatly facilitate the learning process. In response, students will participate in political and civic practice for our class. Students must contribute **at least 10 hours** of direct political participation, volunteer service, and/or civic engagement to a political party, governmental body, or community organization.

I highly recommend that students participate in a variety of different experiences. **Students are encouraged to participate in a variety of organizations and activities to complete their 10 hours and are encouraged to continue their civic engagement activities after class requirements are fulfilled.** Students will present periodic reports to the class on their experiences and will submit a five- to seven-page final reflective essay on their political experiences where they will critically examine how the concepts from the classroom were reflected by their experiences in the “real world.”

Examples of Service Experiences

- Students may assist a local student political organization to engage in a variety of political activities (e.g., College Republicans, College Democrats, the Green Party, among others).
 - Students may also want to attend rallies, protests, or public meetings of local, county, state, or federal government. Students can also volunteer with individual campaigns in local, state, and federal elections. This can take the form of attending meetings, door-knocking, phone banking, among many others.
- Students who choose not to work for a particular party or organization may substitute affiliation with attendance at a series of public meetings and forums, such as attending city council meetings, local governmental meetings (like the water board), or a student government meeting.
- Students may also volunteer with a local not-for-profit in partnership with government bodies.
 - For example, students may volunteer at the Community Action Agency to help clients fill out the forms for food stamps or some other federal assistance program. Or they might help families work to gain access to other state and federal programs (e.g., food stamps).
- Students may also attend a court case open to the public at the County Courthouse.
- Students may also attend and participate in a variety of community events that demonstrate community engagement. Some ideas could be attending a city-wide cultural fair, a community theater production, an art event, or some other community event. Please note that you can only count community events toward **five hours** of this assignment.
- Students may also engage in community service through a variety of different organizations, including but not limited to religious groups, community action organizations, the food bank or homeless shelter, as well as many others.
- Students must complete **at least 10 hours** of activity. You can create a combination of activities to fit your interests.

Additional hours (and more importantly, pertinent reflections on those activities) will demonstrate mastery of the course content and purpose and will increase your points and grade. Be sure to choose your activities carefully so you can make the most of your time, give the most of yourself to our community partners, and learn the most about active citizenship in our community.

Assignments:

1. Project Proposal: Due Friday, September 12th (5 points). Students must identify with the professor what activities in which they will participate. Each student should schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss their potential activities and service.

- Once a student knows how they will complete the requirements for the project, they will submit a written one-paragraph project proposal.
- The proposal must include some description of the activities in which they will be involved, a key contact person, a brief description of the political or civic activities in which they will be engaged, **and a learning plan.**
- The learning plan will allow students to create their own learning goals. Some examples of learning goals are as follows:
 - ***“I will critically reflect on my own experience engaging in political participation (e.g., voting, advocacy, protesting, contacting officials) and explain how the activities function within American institutions.”***
 - ***“I will assess how my community service experience relates to public policy and/or political institutions. I hope to be able to articulate how the government impacts these nonprofit organizations/religious groups/etc. and addresses community needs.”***
 - ***“I will analyze how community engagement reveals the interconnectedness between civic life and American politics.”***
- Students should also address the following questions in their one-paragraph proposal (if applicable):
 - ***What knowledge/understanding do you wish to gain?***
 - ***What skills do you wish to develop?***
 - ***What policy issues are you most interested in learning about through the project?***

2. Political Experience Journal: (2 x 15 points = 30 total points). Due two times during the semester. The log will serve as a means of tracking your service-learning hours. It will also help you reflect on what each experience revealed to you about yourself, your values and ethics, as well as the general topic of citizenship. The log is designed to serve as a journal with two separate sections for you to:

1. Reflect on what you did and what you thought about each particular experience. These notes are essential to the success of the project so please take it seriously. What did you learn about yourself? Did you like participating in the event? What kinds of people were there? Would you say that the event or activity is representative of the community at large?
2. Provide proof of your participation in the activity. This can be in the form of a photo at the event, an email from your supervisor, etc.

You must submit the first log of your Political Experience Journal for the first five hours of volunteer work by Friday, October 10th at 11:59pm. You must submit the second log of your Political Experience Journal for the rest of your hours of service by Friday, November 21st at 11:59pm.

3. Bibliography and Outline: Due Friday, November 7th (15 points). The reflective essay requires some basic background work on the agencies/organizations/groups that the students served with; the issues they engaged with; the candidates they met. All of the political experience essays must have (1) multiple references to **relevant course readings** and (2) at least **five external sources**. Furthermore, you should look for articles and other resources in

- Interview
- Newspaper articles
- Agency or organization websites
- Government documents
- Scholarly journals
- Journals of Opinion

There is no magic formula here. Just find good resources that help you better understand the organization, issue, or problem to which you are contributing your energies. For each source, write a one- to two-sentence description (or annotation) of how each source helps you understand your political experiences.

Also, please include in your bibliography a list of the readings (also with an annotative sentence or two) from the course that you plan to incorporate into your essay. This list does not yet have to be complete but should include at least five articles from our readings. Total of 10 sources. You must use MLA, Chicago or APA style of citation for each reference. Write your annotative sentence after each source.

4. Reflective Essay: Sunday, November 30th by 11:59pm (50 points). Students will write a reflective essay based on their experiences. This paper needs to be at least 5 pages long (and no longer than seven). The instructor recommends students take a rough draft to the Writing Center. In addition to using proper citation (MLA or Chicago), papers will include a **Bibliography** and your final cumulative **Political Experience Log**.

This paper will address several questions pertinent to government, including:

- ***Was it what you expected? Did you fulfill your learning outcomes outlined in the Project Proposal? If so, how? If not, why not?***
- ***How has your experience influenced your understanding of democracy at the local, state, and/or federal level?***
- ***What have you learned about yourself—your own strengths and limitations? What have you learned about your own beliefs and values through this experience?***
- ***Are you more or less likely to volunteer and/or be politically active in the future?***
- ***Does this change your perspective about what it means to be a student?***
- ***What connections have you made with your political experiences and the material covered in class? Cite specific examples from texts or discussions from class.***

Here is a list of recommended additional discussion questions:

- Why have you chosen to work for this party, candidate, or organization?
- What is the branch or organization for which you are volunteering? What is their stated mission?
- How have you observed its relation to other organizations and actors in state, local, or federal government?
- What was your relationship like with others in your organization?
- What have you learned through actively connecting to your community through service?
- How have your political experiences informed your understanding of American political life?

Task	Due Date	Points
Project Proposal	Friday, September 12th by 11:59pm	5
Political Experience Log 1	Friday, October 10th by 11:59pm	15
Political Experience Log 2	Friday, November 21st by 11:59pm	15
Bibliography and Outline	Friday, November 7th by 11:59pm	15
Reflective Essay	Sunday, November 30th by 11:59pm	50